

THE ARGOSY.

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PEACE WITH HONOUR.

BY SYDNEY C. GRIER, AUTHOR OF "IN FURTHEST IND," ETC.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR A CONSIDERATION.

"I CAN'T go on wasting time like this," said Georgia to herself the next morning, as she stood on the terrace, drawn thither by the fascination of the distant view of Bir-ul-Malikat. "Two whole days have slipped away already, and I have not got a step nearer to discovering the antidote, nor even to communicating with Khadija. What am I to do? When those women and children came to ask for medicine yesterday, I thought it was a hopeful sign, and I suppose that if I stayed here long enough my fame might spread even as far as Bir-ul-Malikat; but what good is that when Abd-ur-Rahim won't hear of our setting foot outside the walls? It was bad enough before, when I knew Dick would be angry if I hinted at going over to pay Khadija a visit, but I think I might have talked him round. I only wish the dear boy was here now to be angry, instead of being sent out of the way just when I had been thinking so unkindly about him. But I don't see how Abd-ur-Rahim is to be worked upon, unless any of his own wives or children should happen to fall ill, and even then I am afraid I shouldn't be able to persuade him to let me leave the town, even for an hour or two. I wonder whether Rahah and I could concoct a letter to Khadija, and whether we could get it taken to her if we did? I should think we ought to be able to pique her curiosity, or perhaps her covetousness, supposing that she could read the letter when she got it. Let me see, what could we say?"

She knelt down with her arms on the parapet, and was revolving in her mind honeyed sentences which might conceal an even more tempting meaning, and thus appeal to the witch's cupidity, when her attention was attracted by a moving object between her and Bir-ul-

Malikat. Now that the search for Dick had once more left the immediate neighbourhood of the fortress, the solitude of the desert was so seldom disturbed by any traveller that Georgia watched the approaching speck with interest. As it came nearer, she saw that it was a man mounted on a donkey, but when it passed out of sight round the slope of the hill she thought no more about it. Presently, however, Rahah came in hot haste to seek her mistress.

"There is a messenger from Bir-ul-Malikat waiting outside the door, O my lady, and he will not give his message to me. Is he to be allowed to speak to you?"

"Oh, of course. Someone must be ill," said Georgia, and she returned indoors and donned her *burka*. The man whom she had seen riding across the desert was standing in the outer hall at a suitable distance from the doorway of the passage which led into the harem, and the door was open to allow of conversation. The visitor was respectably dressed, and had the appearance of a steward or other responsible servant, but his first words were not calculated to recommend his mission, at any rate as Rahah translated them.

"O doctor-lady, Khadija, the mother of Yakub, sends thee greetings, and desires thee to visit her at Bir-ul-Malikat."

"Why?" asked Georgia. "Is she ill?"

"I know not," answered the man doggedly.

"Then why does she send for me?"

"That is her business. It is not for any man to dispute the will of Khadija."

Georgia pondered the matter for a moment. Her first impulse was to accept the invitation which had arrived thus opportunely, but its tone was so unpleasant that she began to suspect a trap. If her presence was really needed, Khadija could well afford to send her a more explicit message. It was evident that the matter was not one of life and death, or more would have been made of it, and Georgia had a lively recollection of the way in which she had been lured to the Palace at Kubbet-ul-Haj to warn her against putting faith in mysterious messages. In any case, nothing could be lost, and the respect in which she was held would probably increase, if she declined to pay any attention to a summons worded as this one had been.

"I go nowhere, unless the messenger tells me plainly why I am wanted," she said sharply.

"That is not a reply to satisfy Khadija," returned the messenger.

"Then she must find satisfaction elsewhere," said Georgia.

"Her power is greater than the doctor-lady knows."

"Thou art a fool," said Rahah contemptuously, her wrath aroused by the veiled threat. "My lady also has medicines. Is she likely to fear Khadija?" and she dropped the curtain as a sign that the interview was at an end.

The messenger departed baffled, but it was not without many misgivings that Georgia heard his retreating footsteps crossing the

tilled floor. Had she acted foolishly in refusing so peremptorily the witch's request? It was possible that the terms in which it was couched had merely been adopted in order to try her, and that she had lost once for all the opportunity of gaining an entrance to Bir-ul-Malikat. The thought troubled her considerably, in spite of the persistence with which she assured herself that it was only prudent to act as she had done, and she wandered in and out of the various rooms, unable to settle to any occupation, pausing now and then on the terrace to look across the desert in case the messenger should be returning. Engrossed in watching for him, she failed to notice the approach of another traveller, and it was with some surprise that she received the news which Rahah hurried out to bring her.

"O my lady, another messenger! He says that he is Yakub, the son of Khadija, but he will not say why he is come."

Once more Georgia assumed her *burka* and went to interview the visitor. He was a young man, somewhat foppishly dressed, and evidently a dandy in his way, his appearance producing in Georgia's mind the impression that his mother had spoilt him as a boy, and now lavished upon him all the money she had to spare. He came forward with a slight swagger, and salaamed in rather a perfunctory way.

"O doctor-lady, thy handmaid Khadija my mother sends thee greetings, and entreats thee to visit her at Bir-ul-Malikat."

"Why?" asked Georgia, with a directness which he seemed to find embarrassing, for he fidgeted with his girdle as he replied:

"Nay, O doctor-lady, is it strange that my mother, having heard of thy fame, should be anxious to see thee?"

"But why does she not come here? Is she ill?"

"No; thanks be to God!" was the answer.

"Then is there any one ill in her house?"

"That is not for me to tell the doctor-lady."

"Then neither is it for the doctor-lady to go there," and Georgia was about to retire into the harem again when he sprang forward.

"Let not the doctor-lady turn away the light of her countenance from her servant. There is one ill in the house."

"But who is ill, and what is the matter with him or her?"

"I cannot tell. I have given my message."

"You must tell me if I am to come."

"But it is not in my power, O doctor-lady! My mother has told me no more than that, and I know only that it is one of the women."

"In that case, my friend, you had better return to Bir-ul-Malikat at once, and find out the age of the patient, and her symptoms. Then I will either give you medicine for her, or I will ask leave from Abd-ur-Rahim to go and see her. It is absurd to come to me in this way. I should have no idea what to take with me."

"But it cannot be, O doctor-lady. My mother will tell me no more than I have told thee."

"She must tell me more, if she wishes me to go and see her. You must make her understand that unless she is perfectly open with me, she need not expect me to come. She can send me a letter if she likes, but I must have some idea what is the matter." And Georgia retired into the interior of the harem, feeling that she was acting with a prudence such as Stratford himself need not have despised. That caution was necessary in this case she could not doubt. The repetition of the message, and the persistent mystery in which it was enwrapped, had raised strong suspicions in her mind that there was no sick person at all in the case, and that the request was merely a bait to lure her into the power of the sorceress—a trick which she did not intend should succeed a second time. Her desire was to be able to dictate terms to Khadija, not to be obliged to sue for her own release, and she awaited the further development of the situation with much interest and some anxiety. To pass away the time, she occupied herself in putting her medicine-chest in order, setting Rahah to work to polish her surgical instruments, in which the girl took a keen interest, and even before the business was finished to her satisfaction, another visitor was announced. As usual, Rahah went out to see who it was, and returned in a high state of excitement.

"O my lady, it is Khadija the sorceress herself! Surely she has heard of my lady's power, and comes to prove it."

Georgia's heart beat a good deal faster than before, as she walked slowly down the long room, resolutely refusing to quicken her steps, but she succeeded in keeping her anxiety from betraying itself in her voice as she gave her visitor the usual greeting. The sorceress, a small shrunken old woman, with white hair and piercing dark eyes, looked at her sharply before making her hurried reply.

"And upon thee be peace, O doctor-lady! Will my lady be pleased to accompany her handmaid to Bir-ul-Malikat, where one of the household is grievously sick?"

"I must hear more about it before I come," said Georgia, turning and leading the way through the passage back into the harem. "Sit down and rest, O Khadija, and tell me who is ill," and, as she spoke, she seated herself upon the divan opposite the visitor, while Rahah took her stand beside her to interpret what was said.

"Nay," said Khadija; "surely the doctor-lady, who is so wise, needs not to be told anything? She knows all things of herself."

This was a direct challenge, and Georgia saw that it would be necessary to administer a lesson to her visitor. She drew herself up, and fixed her eyes sternly on Khadija.

"You are right, O Khadija. I know many things without hearing of them from you, and before we talk again of your matters, I will ask you certain questions, and, according as you deal truly with me in answering them or not, so will I decide whether I will grant your request."

Khadija looked up in evident surprise, not unmixed with appre-

hension, and Georgia went on, speaking in a low voice, but very slowly and distinctly:

"You are learned in poisons, Khadija. Tell me, then, what was the drug that Fath-ud-Din used to poison the Queen of England's Envoy—that drug which you gave him?"

"God forbid!" cried Khadija, raising her skinny hands in indignant protest. "Does the doctor-lady think that her handmaid is as one of the evil women in the corners of the bazaars, who sell poisons to wives tired of their husbands? Far be it from me to deal with deadly drugs in such a way!"

"I have other questions to ask, Khadija; but I shall speak to you no more unless you answer this one. Also it would be well for you to answer it truly, for I know the answer."

"If the doctor-lady knows, why should she ask me?" grumbled the old woman, but the response was prompt.

"That I may see whether you are dealing truly with me or not, O Khadija."

"It might have been the juice of a plant?" was the tentative suggestion. "Yea, doubtless it was the juice of a plant," with the air of one who had just remembered a forgotten fact.

"It might have been, but it was not."

"It might have been some metal, or a deadly fruit, or the venom of a serpent?" the last with a cunning side-look at Georgia.

"No, it was none of those; but we are coming to the point. Hasten, O Khadija; my patience will not last for ever."

"Could it have been the essence distilled from the dried body of—some beast?"

Georgia rose from her seat and turned away, and the old woman threw herself before her, and clutched her dress.

"O my lady, was it the poison of a deadly fish?"

"Ah—now we are getting at the truth," said Georgia, turning, but refusing to sit down again. "It was a fish, then; but how was the poison administered?"

"Surely the doctor-lady knows all things. It is in vain that one should try to deceive her. There was but one small drop of the medicine, and it was to be given in a cup of coffee."

"And it was carried for safety in the jewel of a ring, which was to be dropped into the coffee. Is it not so, Khadija? But we will speak of the Father of sleep again presently. Tell me now who it is that is ill in your house, and what the sickness is."

As they resumed their seats on the divan, Khadija gave a lingering look into Georgia's eyes, trying to discover whether she was possessed of information upon this point also, but finding herself baffled, leaned forward and spoke in a whisper.

"O doctor-lady, I will not deceive thee. It is my master's daughter—my Rose of the World, my child Zeynab."

"And what is the matter with her?"

"O my lady, I will hide nothing from thee. The maiden is light of foot and venturesome as the wild goats. Some days ago—it may have been four or five—she was climbing upon the walls of the garden with the slave-girls, and she declared to them that she could go further than any of them along the wall where it was broken. Thy handmaid called to her with many rebukes to come down, but she would go on, and presently a part of the wall fell with her to the ground. Nor was that all, for a great stone lay upon her foot and crushed it, and nothing that I have done will cure it."

"What have you tried?" asked Georgia, and the old woman gave a list of various native remedies she had administered, all of them sounding equally inadequate to a European ear, and the greater number either painful or disgusting.

"And now, O my lady, the foot is swollen to the size of twice my head, and it has turned black, and the maiden sobs and moans day and night."

"That sounds as though the bones were crushed," said Georgia. "I may have to take off the foot."

"Never, O doctor-lady! Better that the child should die, though she is the light of my eyes, and Fath-ud-Din will slay me if any ill befalls her. Rather than lose her foot she must die, for who will marry a woman with only one foot?"

"I will have a look at it, and see what I can do," said Georgia. "It may be possible to remove the shattered bones without amputating. But you must understand that if I come, I take the responsibility and the authority in the case. If it is only possible to save the girl's life by amputating her foot, it must be done. You must leave me to settle it with Fath-ud-Din, and I will take the blame."

"Nay!" cried Khadija, with still more energy. "Fath-ud-Din must know nothing of this, whether the maiden recover or not. O doctor-lady, she is all that I have, saving my son Yakub, and when I have seen her married to the king's son, Antar Khan, I can die happily; but Fath-ud-Din would take her at once from my keeping if he heard what had happened to her, or knew that I had brought in an English doctor woman to see her. Thou wilt not tell him, O doctor-lady? I know that the English speak the truth. Fath-ud-Din hates them, but if they have the skill to save his daughter, it is well to make use of it without his knowledge."

It is sad to be obliged to confess it, but it was this speech that decided Georgia to embark upon a course so unprofessional that, if it had become known in England, it would have been the duty of her medical *confrères* to drive her with ignominy from their midst. She made up her mind deliberately to haggle for her fee before she visited the patient.

"Why was it that you gave Fath-ud-Din the poison with which to injure the Envoy?" she asked suddenly. Khadija looked astonished at the unexpected change of subject.

"Nay, O my lady, is it not the duty of a servant to do her master's will?"

"You are not in the position of an ordinary servant to Fath-ud-Din; you are more of an adviser and helper. Why did you make it easy for him to poison a man who had done you no wrong?"

"I hate the English," responded the old woman sullenly. "They came and burnt my village because our men had raided into Khemistan, and my husband and my elder son were killed."

"And now you are obliged to rely upon an Englishwoman to help you to avoid the wrath of Fath-ud-Din? Hear me, Khadija; I will come to Bir-ul-Malikat and do my utmost for Zeynab, but only on one condition."

"And that is, O doctor-lady——?"

"That you give me the antidote for the poison you call the Father of sleep, and tell me how to apply it. If I find you have deceived me, Fath-ud-Din shall know everything; but if the Envoy recovers, all will be well."

"O my lady, she will poison you as soon as you have cured the girl," put in Rahah in a frightened whisper.

"I think not," said Georgia. "Tell her that before I leave this house I shall write out an account of the circumstances, to be sent immediately to Fath-ud-Din in case anything should happen to me."

Khadija received the information with a grunt. "And what will the doctor-lady do in return for the antidote?" she asked.

"I will go with her to Bir-ul-Malikat," replied Georgia, "and do all I can to save the girl's foot. Whether I find that amputation is necessary or not, I will remain in the house until the patient is fairly on the way to recovery, that she may have the best possible chance."

The old woman nodded her head meditatively. "Thou wilt cure my Zeynab, and I will give thee the antidote. That is fair. Thou wilt come at once, O doctor-lady?"

"I must make a few arrangements first. You are prepared to give my maid and me a room to ourselves, I suppose, as we shall be obliged to remain over the night? It may be necessary for us to spend four or five days with you."

"Oh, yes, the doctor-lady shall be lodged in the best part of the harem, in the rooms of my Zeynab's mother—may she rest in peace!—and the women of the household shall see to her comfort."

"That is well," said Georgia, as she left the room and went to seek Lady Haigh. Rahah followed her.

"It is not safe, O my lady. She will kill you if she can, and there will be many opportunities if you are staying in her house."

"We must try to take adequate precautions, and baffle her, Rahah. In any case, the possibility of success is worth the risk."

Nevertheless, as Georgia knocked softly at the door of the sick-room, the thought crossed her mind: "At any rate, I will make sure before

I go that I shall be allowed to try my remedy if I succeed in bringing it back. It is a risk, undoubtedly, to go, and I shall hear a good deal about it from Dick, if I ever return, so that I won't enter on it as a mere speculation."

"What is it, Georgie?" asked Lady Haigh, coming out. "Is anything fresh the matter?" for the repressed excitement in Georgia's manner caught her attention at once.

Instead of answering immediately, Georgia drew her to the window and threw open the lattice, so that the light fell full on the faces of both.

"Have you confidence in me, Lady Haigh?—as a doctor, I mean?"

"Every confidence, Georgie. I would sooner have you to attend me if I was ill than any male doctor I know. But why do you ask? Oh, my dear, don't—don't tell me that it is anything about Dugald! He doesn't seem quite so strong here, I know; but it is only the change of air. Don't say that he is really worse!"

"No, that is not what I wanted to say, though it has to do with Sir Dugald. Just before we left Kubbet-ul-Haj, Lady Haigh, I found out the name of the poison Fath-ud-Din used against him. Now I have the chance of obtaining the antidote; but that involves my going to Bir-ul-Malik, and perhaps remaining there for several days, attending Fath-ud-Din's daughter. If I can cure her, I am to have the antidote given to me. What I want to know is, if I obtain the antidote, will you let me use it for Sir Dugald?"

"But you must not go, Georgie! I can't let you run into danger, and what you propose would be fearfully dangerous."

"That isn't the question, Lady Haigh; and the danger is my affair. You can't prevent my going, except by assuring me that you will not let me try the antidote."

"Oh, Georgie, how can you be so unkind?" And Lady Haigh fairly broke down. "He is getting worse, I know it; and he will slip away without ever recognising me or speaking to me again. I ought to prevent your going, I know; but I can't! Oh, what will Major North say to me? No, Georgie, don't go! We have had our share of happiness, Dugald and I; and how can I dare to risk your future and Major North's? Oh, why did you ask me, and make me pronounce my husband's death-sentence? No, don't mind what I say; I am nearly mad with trouble. You are not to go!"

"Nevertheless, I am going," said Georgia, her face very pale. "My only condition is that you are to use the antidote, if I can get it sent to you, whatever happens to me. You are quite right; I ought not to have asked you. It was only that it struck me suddenly that you might listen to Dick and Mr. Stratford again, and it would all be no use. You promise me that you will try the antidote, if I can get it?"

"Nothing can be worse than his state now," sobbed Lady Haigh.

"Yes, I will use it, Georgie. How could I do otherwise when you are risking your life to obtain it for him? You believe in it, I can see that."

"I do, and I hope that before long you will have good cause to believe in it too. Now I must tell Mr. Stratford of my intended mission. I shall say nothing about the antidote; but I won't get into trouble again by going off without leave."

Stratford was busied with Fitz and Kustendjian in compiling the official chronicle of the events of the last few days, and it did not strike him that there was any special danger in Georgia's going to visit a patient who had asked for her presence. He knew nothing of the evil fame of Khadija, and thought that if Abd-ur-Rahim could be brought to give his consent, the ride to Bir-ul-Malikat would be a pleasant change for Georgia after her imprisonment within the four walls of the harem.

"One of us might go over with the escort and fetch you back," he suggested, "if you could fix any special time."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Georgia, with a guilty feeling of concealment, "for I don't know how long I shall be. If it is necessary to perform an operation, I shall probably be detained some time. Could you spare Mr. Anstruther to help me get my things together, and to see that the horses are properly saddled?"

Fitz jumped up from the divan with great alacrity, and when Georgia had him alone, she confided her plan to him, explaining the importance of her going to Bir-ul-Malikat at this juncture, and the probability that her stay there might extend over several days. His first impulse was naturally to declare that he would go too, and to reproach her with unkindness and lack of confidence in him when she refused his escort somewhat decidedly. But Georgia had her answer ready.

"I don't want you at Bir-ul-Malikat, Mr. Anstruther, because I think you would be more useful here. I want to arrange a code of signals which will show whether all is going well or not. Do you know anything of heliography? I have a small mirror in my dressing-case, and, if you have another, we could each signal night and morning if everything was going on well, for I ought to know if Sir Dugald gets worse. I suppose one flash would mean 'All right!' and two 'Send help!'"

"Oh, we can do better than that," said Fitz, who had brightened perceptibly when he found that he might be of use even though he was not allowed to act as escort. "I will jot down the Morse code for you, Miss Keeling, and then we can hold conversations. Long and short flashes will represent dashes and dots, you see, and none of the natives will be able to imitate our signals, though they might easily twig what one flash meant, and signal 'All right!' when it was all wrong. You didn't know I studied telegraphy a little before I came out, did you? One never knows when things may come in

useful, and I chummed up with a clerk in the Whitcliffe post-office, and got him to put me up to the dodges."

Leaving Fitz occupied in writing out the code, Georgia next made a raid on the stores under the care of Ismail Baksh. She felt that it was of the greatest importance that Rahah and she should take their own provisions with them, since to depend on Khadija's liberality would be merely a gratuitous invitation to her to poison them both, and with this danger in her mind she secured a sufficient quantity of meat extract and other portable articles of food to last for three or four days. Ismail Baksh demurred considerably to parting with the stores in his charge, except in obedience to an officially signed order, yielding only under protest, and when he discovered, from some chance words let drop by Rahah, the real object of the journey, he could scarcely be restrained from going at once to Stratford, and begging him to prevent it. Rahah overwhelmed him with shrill reproaches, for, little as she approved of the expedition herself, she was determined not to allow any man living to thwart her mistress's wishes; but it was Georgia herself who forced him to give an unwilling acquiescence to the plan. Her plea that she was going to secure a medicine that might cure the *Burra Sahib*, he dismissed with contempt, remarking that the *Burra Sahib's* illness did not concern her, a slight to her profession, which aroused all the ire of which Georgia was capable. Looking straight at him, she spoke sternly:

"Am I to ask your leave to go where I will, Ismail Baksh—you who have eaten my father's salt? I am going to Bir-ul-Malikat, and I forbid you to interfere. You take too much upon yourself."

Ismail Baksh saluted in dumb amazement as Rahah translated the words with much gusto.

"Truly Sinjā Kilin himself speaks in his daughter!" he murmured submissively as Georgia increased by another tin the pile which Rahah was carrying, and left the room without looking at him. He watched the two women out of sight, and securing the door of the store-room, went off to his quarters, revolving many things in his mind.

Georgia's preparations were now almost complete. Rahah had added several native loaves and a quantity of flour to her stock of provisions, together with a saucepan and a new water-jar, and Fitz brought Georgia the paper on which he had written out the Morse code, and reminded her that it was possible, by means of two mirrors placed at right angles to each other, to obtain a flash when the sun might seem to be too low in the heavens for signalling to be attempted with success. The only thing now left to be done, although it was a very important one, was to obtain Abd-ur-Rahim's consent to the expedition. It occurred to Georgia that in this she might find a powerful ally in Khadija, and before sending Rahah to ask the old commandant to come and speak to her, she returned to the room in which she had left the sorceress. When Abd-ur-Rahim appeared, Rahah was walking meekly behind him, and passing into the inner

room, took her place behind her mistress without a word, but it struck Georgia presently that she must have made a suggestion to him on the way.

"What does the doctor-lady require?" asked Abd-ur-Rahim.

"I wish to go to Bir-ul-Malikat with Khadija, who has one sick in the house that she desires me to see," said Georgia.

"But the doctor-lady must remember that it was not even permitted to her yesterday to visit the sick in the town, outside the citadel. How, then, could her servant suffer her to cross the desert to Bir-ul-Malikat?"

"Surely you will make an exception in favour of Khadija, who is the servant of your lord Fath-ud-Din?" urged Georgia, aghast at this new possibility of failure just as success seemed to be in her grasp.

"I know not," replied Abd-ur-Rahim cautiously. "Who is it that is sick?"

"Make no inquiry into matters that concern thee not, O Abd-ur-Rahim," put in Khadija, with more than the usual touch of sharpness in her tone. "It is enough for thee that one of thy lord's household is sick, and that I desire the doctor-lady to come and see her. It will not be for thy health, nor for that of thine house, for thee to put difficulties in the way of her coming."

Abd-ur-Rahim grew visibly paler under the implied threat. "But what shall I say to my lord and to the English if any evil befalls the doctor-lady?" he asked helplessly.

"What evil should befall her?" snapped Khadija. "Am I a dog, to ill-treat the one who comes to help me?"

"Nay," stammered Abd-ur-Rahim. "Far be it from me to hint evil concerning thee. But there are dangers in the desert, and perhaps among the servants at Bir-ul-Malikat there might be—Nay, I cannot let the doctor-lady go unless I have a surety in her place."

"Whom dost thou seek?" demanded Khadija.

"Thy son Yakub, that he may remain here until the doctor-lady has returned in peace."

"It is well," returned the old woman, after a scarcely perceptible pause. "Why should I fear for my son, since I mean well to the doctor-lady? Let him come, and welcome."

"Then I will ride with thee to Bir-ul-Malikat, and receive the young man before the doctor-lady arrives there," said Abd-ur-Rahim, determined to leave no opening for evading his conditions.

Khadija gave an angry snort, but to demur would have been to cast a doubt on the honesty of her own intentions, and she submitted to the inevitable. Abd-ur-Rahim departed to order the horses to be got ready, and Georgia went to say good-bye to Lady Haigh, and to give her last directions respecting the treatment of Sir Dugald. Fitz received a parting injunction to take care of Colleen Bawn, and was further honoured by having Dick's sword committed to his keeping.

Georgia would have liked to take it with her, but it was rather an unmanageable piece of luggage, and she gave it into his charge with no little reluctance.

There was still another parting to be undergone, for as the three women passed through the front portion of the house and reached the steep path which led down into the courtyard, Ismail Baksh came to meet them, with his hand on the shoulder of his son Ibrahim.

"O my lady," he said to Georgia, "thy servant would entreat thy forgiveness for his words of an hour ago. It was not for him to order thy doings, but he would fain serve thee still, for thy father's sake. He is old, and cannot now fight as he did once, but let my lady permit his son to take his place, and guard her in her journey and in her sojourn in the strange house."

"O my lady, let him come," whispered Rahah, and Georgia assented to the old man's request. Ibrahim was not likely to be of much service as a guard, but he might contrive to escape with the antidote if she and Rahah were prevented from leaving when they wished.

"It is well," said Ismail Baksh. "Guard well the doctor-lady, O my son, for thy father ate her father's bread for many years. Count thine own life nothing in comparison with the life of Sinjāj Kilin's daughter, and it shall please thy father well, whatever issue it may please God to send to this matter."

"What says the old fool about Sinjāj Kilin?" demanded Khadija, catching the name.

"My lady is Sinjāj Kilin's daughter," said Rahah, with much pride, but the look on the old woman's face made her recoil. "O my lady, she means to kill us," she whispered fearfully when she could gain Georgia's ear.

"We can't turn back now, Rahah."

"If the doctor-lady should run into some danger in spite of me, and evil should befall her, thou wilt not hold me guilty?" Khadija was saying to Abd-ur-Rahim.

"Nay, surely, if it is no fault of thine," was the response.

"It is well," said Khadija.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SILENCE THAT WAS GOLDEN.

ALTHOUGH she would not for the world have allowed either Rahah or Khadija to discover the fact, Georgia was conscious of a distinct sense of shrinking as she rode under the gateway of Bir-ul-Malik, after seeing Abd-ur-Rahim start on his homeward journey with young Yakub among his followers. The place was less of a fortress, and more of a country seat than Bir-ul-Malik, but the high walls which

surrounded the grounds of the great house, and about which a number of smaller buildings and huts were clustered, were quite capable of defence, and the assemblage of men visible about the gate and courtyard showed that a respectable garrison could be collected in time of need. Still, the fortifications were not of such a character as to be able to stand a protracted siege, and Georgia guessed what was indeed the truth, that while they were useful to withstand the sudden raid of any marauding border tribe, who might be supposed to be swayed by the hope of plunder more strongly than by superstitious fear, the real bulwark of the place was Khadija's reputation as a sorceress. Here she was supreme, and her fame protected alike her precious charge and the servants and labourers who formed the little colony. When she had once secured the transference of Jahan Beg's rights in Bir-ul-Malik to her master, by diverting the water-supply, she had removed from her path the only enemy on whom the universal belief in her supernatural power for ill had no effect, and who had been able to keep an eye on her doings. Every man and woman in the place was bound to Khadija's service both by interest and by fear, and Georgia felt that it was indeed well that Abd-ur-Rahim had insisted on receiving her son as a hostage before he would entrust his prisoners to her tender mercies.

Dismounting from their steeds in the inner courtyard of the great house, where a number of slave girls were gathered to stare at them, the new arrivals were led by Khadija into the rooms which she had promised them, and which, as Georgia was delighted to find, looked out on the desert in the direction of Bir-ul-Malik. After a short interval to allow them to arrange their possessions and to remove a little of the sand of travel, the old woman came to fetch them, and led them through the rambling, half-deserted house to the opposite wing. Everything in the rooms through which they were conducted spoke of vanished wealth and a gorgeous past. The divans were covered with rich silks, now faded, torn and dirty, and costly ornaments of European manufacture stood broken and tarnished in corners. It was evident that Fath-ud-Din's ambitious plans for his daughter's future had not impelled him to keep her present abode even in tolerable repair, while it was not difficult to distinguish that Khadija cherished a strong preference for muddle and dirt over cleanliness and order. The state of the passages and of the bedrooms opening from them was extraordinary; they seemed to be filled both with the dust and with the rags of ages, while in the inmost room of all, and therefore the one with the smallest allowance of air and light, was to be found the jewel enshrined in this sorry casket, Fath-ud-Din's daughter Zeynab, the destined bride of Antar Khan.

"This is my Rose of the World, O doctor-lady," said Khadija, when she had led Georgia into the dark close room, and as she spoke she indicated a small form crouched among a heap of cushions on a

broken bedstead. It was so dark that there was no possibility of seeing anything distinctly.

"Get up on that chest, Rahah, and open the lattice a little way," said Georgia, and as the girl, with a vigorous wrench, forced open the small high window, which moved so stiffly that it was evident it had not been touched for years, the light disclosed a very white little Rose indeed, with a face drawn with pain, and grimed and blistered with crying. The child (she could not have been more than ten) was lying in an uncomfortable cramped position, with the injured foot fastened down to one of the legs of the bedstead. This was Khadija's latest idea of the way to reduce a swelling. Before saying anything, Georgia stooped and cut the cord, replacing the foot gently on the cushions, but the slight movement drew an uneasy little cry from the patient.

"Who are these people?" she demanded fretfully of Khadija, trying to arrange the folds of the dirty wrapper she was wearing into some semblance of dignity. "I do not want visitors when I cannot put on my best clothes. Why hast thou brought these women here, O my nurse? Who are they, I say?" sharply.

"It is the great doctor-lady, who will cure thy foot, my dove," replied Khadija, somewhat shamefacedly.

"The Englishwoman?" exclaimed the child, starting up and glaring at Georgia with eyes like those of a hunted stag. Then, sinking down again, she burst into a storm of angry sobs, striking Khadija passionately when she tried to calm her. It was useless for Georgia to speak, and equally useless for the old woman to entreat her Rose, her dove, her eyes, her soul, her Queen Zeynab, to be quiet and let the doctor-lady look at her foot. The sobs continued with unabated violence, mingled with torrents of vituperation directed at Khadija, and the child fought like a wild cat when any one attempted to touch her.

"Leave her alone," said Georgia, with an imperative gesture, to Khadija: "come here, and let her have her cry out. Now tell me what you have been saying to her to make her afraid of me."

"Nothing, O doctor-lady, nothing, in the name of God! It is only that the maiden fears the face of strangers."

"That would not account for her terror on finding out who I was. Speak, Khadija, and tell the truth, or I leave the house at once."

Terror-stricken by the threat, the old woman mumbled out an explanation, which Rahah translated to her mistress.

"She says, O my lady, that since she heard you were at Bir-ul-Malik, she has frightened the child with your name. When she was going to try a new medicine, or to hurt her at all, she would say, 'If you cry or struggle, I will send for the cruel English doctor-lady, who will cut off your foot in little pieces,' and the child was quiet at once."

"That is quite enough," said Georgia, observing that Zeynab,

guessing that the rest were talking about her, had hushed her sobs in order to try to hear what they were saying, and she returned to the side of the bed. The sobs recommenced at once, but Georgia laid a firm hand on the child's shoulder, and signed to Rahah to interpret for her.

"When you have quite finished crying, Zeynab, you can let me know, and I will show you something I have got here."

The sobs continued for a minute or two with equal violence, but presently they slackened a little, and Zeynab inquired brokenly, "What kind of thing is it?"

"Something you will like to see," said Georgia, and Rahah added on her own account as she translated the words: "The doctor-lady says so, and the English always tell the truth."

"Do they?" asked Zeynab with interest. "I thought they were very bad people." She had ceased to sob, but was too proud to ask for the sight she had been promised, and Georgia took something out of her bag, and waited. More from habit than from any intention of making use of it, she had slipped in with her instruments a German toy which she had found very useful in winning the friendship of children in her old hospital days, and which had proved a source of great delight to Nur Jahan and the other women in the Palace at Kubbet-ul-Haj. It was carved in wood, and represented a cock standing on a barrel. The barrel contained a yard-measure, and when the tape was drawn out the bird flapped his wings, faster or slower according to the rapidity of the movement.

"What is it?" inquired Zeynab at last, looking curiously at the cock, her interest stimulated by the doctor's silence. For answer, Georgia pulled out the tape, and the child gave a shriek of wild delight.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" she cried. "Is it alive?"

Rahah explained that the bird was merely one of the marvels of the white people, and Zeynab, after a somewhat timid approach, ventured to pull the tape for herself. Then she was fairly won, and screamed with pleasure as the cock flapped his wings for her. Not to make the wonder too cheap, Georgia reclaimed it after a short time; but the ice was broken. Zeynab lay back on her cushions and looked at her musingly.

"Art thou really a woman?" she asked at last.

"Yes. What else could I be?" asked Georgia, smiling.

"I thought thou wert perhaps a man," said the child shyly, and Georgia felt devoutly thankful that Dick was not there to hear her. "Shall I tell thee why, O doctor-lady?" she went on, then turned suddenly to Khadija. "O my nurse, I am thirsty. Bring me some sherbet."

"One of the slaves shall prepare it for thee, my soul."

"No, there is no one who makes it as thou dost. Fetch it for me, O my nurse, or I shall scream."

With a very bad grace Khadija complied with the imperious command, and hobbled out of the room. The moment she was gone, Zeynab took a folded piece of paper from beneath her pillow, and laid it in Georgia's hand.

"There!" she said, with a radiant smile. Georgia unfolded the paper, and found it to contain a wretched native print, vile alike in drawing, colour and intention, and purporting to represent an English ball-room. Some resemblance between the open coat and cotton blouse which Georgia wore with her riding-skirt, and a man's dress-coat and shirt-front, had struck the child, and led her to the conclusion that Georgia was a man.

"I see what you mean," said Georgia, whose one glance at the print had filled her with loathing; "but, Zeynab, this is not a very pretty picture for you to have. If you will give it to me, I will find you a book with several pictures in it instead."

"Give me the book first," was the prudent answer, as Zeynab reclaimed her treasure jealously. "This is all I have. What are thy pictures like, O doctor-lady?"

"There is one of the Queen of England and many of her family," said Georgia, thinking of some odd numbers of illustrated papers which had somehow survived so far the various vicissitudes of the Mission. "I might even find you two or three books if you will be good and let me look at your foot."

"Oh, my foot!" Zeynab's face was pursed up once more in readiness to cry. "It hurts so dreadfully; and Khadija said thou wouldst cut it off."

"Not if I can possibly help it, I promise you. Will you be a brave girl, and let me look at it quietly? I don't mind your crying out if I hurt you very much; but you must not struggle, and I will be as gentle as I can."

"But why should I be hurt? I am Queen Zeynab."

"Because I must hurt you a little now if you are to get well afterwards. If you are queen here, show it by being braver than any one else would be. I am treating you like a grown-up person, Zeynab, not like a baby."

"It is well," said Zeynab, with a frightened little smile. "Thou wilt not cut my foot off bit by bit?"

"Certainly not. If I should have to cut it off, I will give you something to prevent your feeling it at all, so that you won't even know that it is being done; but I hope it will not be necessary. Now let me see it."

With great bravery the child allowed her foot to be disencumbered of the mass of dirty rags in which it was enveloped, and lay still with compressed lips while Georgia made her examination. The theory which the doctor had formed on hearing Khadija's report she saw at once to be the correct one. The splintered bone was accountable for the swelling, and would have induced mortification if it had

remained much longer in the wound. The foot was in a frightful state, but there was still just a possibility of operating with success. The operation must be undertaken at once, Georgia decided, if the limb was to be saved, and she turned to Rahah to tell her to get out the necessary anæsthetic. The movement, slight as it was, gave a jerk to the rickety bedstead, which communicated itself to the wounded foot, and a moan of pain forced itself from the child's lips. Almost simultaneously with the sound, Khadija precipitated herself into the room with a suddenness which suggested that she must have been listening at the door, and, seizing Georgia by the shoulders, thrust her violently away from the bed and to the other side of the little room.

"What art thou doing to my child?" she demanded, standing between the doctor and Zeynab, who was sobbing and wailing with the pain of the rough jar which the impetuous onslaught had caused to her foot. "Answer me, O doctor-lady. I sent for thee to cure her, and wouldst thou torment her when I am not by?"

"It is thou who art hurting me, O my nurse," wailed Zeynab. "The doctor-lady did but shake me a little, but thou hast killed me. Go away, and let the doctor-lady do what she likes."

"What! has the doctor-lady bewitched thy heart away from me already?" cried the old woman, turning upon her. "Ah, wicked girl, what hast thou there?" and she pounced upon the vile daub which was worth a whole art gallery to Zeynab, and tore it to pieces. "Have I not forbidden thee to see or hear anything of the evil doings of the wicked white people?"

"I hate thee!" screamed Zeynab, flinging herself upon her, and attacking her with all her might. "The white people are good, and thou hast torn my picture. I love the doctor-lady, but thou art a pig!"

"Hush, Zeynab, you will make your foot worse," said Georgia, interposing between Khadija and her charge. "I am going to give you something that will keep you from feeling pain, and then I hope I shall be able to do you some good."

"Nay," cried Khadija; "wouldst thou steal away the child's soul under pretence of saving her pain? I know thee, O doctor-lady, and thou shalt never shut up my Zeynab's soul in a bottle with snakes and devils and unclean animals. I have heard of thy doings, and of the devils thou hast in thy keeping, and how thou dost steal souls that thou mayest make them work evil at thy will. Thou shalt not charm my Zeynab's soul away to imprison it with them."

But it only needed this to determine Zeynab immediately in favour of the anæsthetic.

"Shut up my soul in a bottle?" she exclaimed with eager interest. "But thou wilt not keep it there always, O doctor-lady? I should like it for a little while, but not for long."

"I couldn't put your soul in a bottle if I wanted it there," said

Georgia, laughing, "but I promise you that I won't keep you without it longer than I can help."

"I tell thee thou shalt not use thy vile drugs on the maiden," declared Khadija stoutly, as Rahah began to get out the necessary implements.

"Then how am I to perform the operation?" asked Georgia.

"I will call two of the slave-women, and they shall hold the child quiet."

"O doctor-lady, thou wilt not let her bring them to hold me down?" entreated Zeynab piteously. "They hurt so dreadfully."

"Certainly not. I am in charge of this case, Khadija, and I refuse to undertake the operation unless the patient is put under chloroform. If she struggled, frightful harm might be done."

"At least I shall be here to wake her if I see that thou art taking away her soul."

"If you do, I shall have to chloroform you too. No, if you stay in the room, you will not move unless I tell you to do anything. Otherwise I must send you away."

Khadija was vanquished. With a grunt she wrapped her head in her veil, and sat down on the floor at the head of the bed, while Georgia and Rahah proceeded with their preparations, the carved chest in which Zeynab's best clothes were kept serving as an impromptu operating-table. The poor little patient grew paler and paler as she caught sight of one horror after another, for she insisted on raising herself on her elbow to look at everything, and demanded that Rahah should show her the instruments one by one. Georgia put a stop to this at once, but the child's terror was already so extreme that nothing but the determination not to allow Khadija to triumph kept her from entreating the doctor-lady to postpone the operation. She looked up with a pitiful smile when the chloroform was about to be administered, and seemed almost ready to beg for a respite; but Khadija was leaning forward and scanning her face keenly, on the alert to take advantage of the slightest willingness to yield, and she said with a little gasp:

"O doctor-lady, I am not frightened. Go on, O girl."

But when the chloroform had taken effect, and Rahah moved aside a little to enable Georgia to reach the patient more easily, Khadija caught a glimpse of her charge, and sprang up.

"Thou hast killed her, O doctor-lady! Alas, my Rose of the World, that thy Khadija should have given thee into the hands of the infidel!" and she was about to shake the child violently, in the hope of restoring her to consciousness; but Georgia's patience was at an end.

"Take her out," she said sharply to Rahah, to the intense delight of the handmaiden; and before Khadija realised what was happening to her, she was outside the door, and the door was bolted on the inside, while Rahah assured her emphatically through the crack that

the child was alive, and would remain so if she would only keep quiet, but that if she made any noise or disturbance, the worst results might be confidently expected to ensue. Terrified by the remembrance that her darling was now absolutely in the power of the strangers, Khadija crouched silently at the door and made no sign, while in the respite afforded by her exclusion from the room, Georgia, with Rahah's assistance, performed her task speedily and successfully. The splinter was extracted and the broken bone set, after which the wound was carefully dressed, with the aid of appliances such as had never been seen in Ethiopia before, and Rahah contemplated the result with pride.

"Regular hospital treatment!" she said, adopting the words she had once heard Dr. Headlam use to Georgia with reference to a case of his own, and then turned her attention to making as comfortable a bed as possible out of the coverlets and cushions scattered about, that the patient might not return to consciousness on the wretched bedstead she had occupied hitherto. When everything was finished, the door was opened and Khadija again admitted. She came in suspiciously, and looked askance at all she saw; but, on finding that Zeynab was sleeping quietly, sat down beside her without uttering a word.

The operation once successfully completed, Georgia and Rahah settled down to an extremely monotonous mode of life for several days. Their sole interest and excitement was caused by the progress or relapses of the patient and by the necessity of keeping an eye on Khadija. Not only was it extremely likely that the old woman would try to poison them, but she also cherished a lively distrust of Georgia's dressings, and there was a constant risk that in a frenzy of rage she might tear them off, and even interfere with the open wound itself, in which case poor Zeynab would have been worse off than before. But, as the days passed on and Zeynab continued to make progress, the old woman began to believe once more in the possibility of her charge's regaining perfect health. The little face which had been so pinched and pain-lined began to recover its bloom, and Georgia found it possible to believe in the loveliness the report of which had spread even to Kubbet-ul-Haj, and which had earned for Zeynab her pet-name of Rose of the World. Warm water and the gift of a piece of the doctor-lady's soap were powerful inducements to the child to keep her face clean, and the consequent improvement in her appearance surprised no one more than Khadija. Her wild outbreaks of wrath ceased gradually as Zeynab's eyes grew brighter and her cheeks less thin, and her manner to the strangers became markedly gracious. But this did not lead to any slackening of the precautions observed by the visitors, for they knew that their danger was considerably increased by the fact that they had performed their part of the bargain, while Khadija had not as yet discharged hers. Every day Rahah cooked their food over a spirit-lamp and

drew from the well the water they needed, while Ibrahim was also provided for out of the stores they had brought with them. At night, moreover, Rahah patented a scheme of defence of which the idea was entirely her own. Before leaving Bir-ul-Malik, she had begged from Ismail Baksh a box of tin-tacks, and every night she strewed these upon the floor, with the points upwards. Georgia remarked that if the house should catch fire, and they found it necessary to escape hurriedly, they themselves would be the first to suffer; but Rahah was not deterred from adopting her plan by this consideration. She had also possessed herself of a whistle, with which it was her intention to summon Ibrahim from his slumbers to the rescue, in case of an attack in force, and she explained this to him very carefully, only to find that the idea of entering the harem, even on an errand of such urgency, appalled him almost more than the prospect that murder would be done if he stayed outside.

"But I have found out something else from Ibrahim, O my lady," said Rahah, when describing the result of the interview to her mistress. "I know why it is that Khadija hates the name of Sinjāj Kilin, your father. He it was who attacked her village, and whose soldiers killed her husband and son, and she has been desiring vengeance ever since. That is why I think we are not at all safe here, for she would rejoice to revenge herself upon you."

But Georgia turned a deaf ear to the suggestion that she should leave her patient before her recovery was assured, even when she spelt out Fitz's first heliograph message on the morning after her arrival. He appeared to be in a conversational mood.

"Stratford was like a dozen wild cats last night when he found you were not coming back just yet. He is afraid North will skin him alive when he returns. Lady Haigh is awfully unhappy about you. She says she is certain you are in great danger, and begs you to come back at once, and not to mind about the medicine."

In answer to this, Georgia flashed back by slow degrees:

"We are quite well and safe. Operation successfully performed, but I must stay here a few days to look after patient."

To this determination she continued to adhere firmly, notwithstanding the agonised entreaties to return which Fitz transmitted to her every day from Lady Haigh. He kept her informed of Sir Dugald's condition, and she directed any slight changes of treatment she thought advisable, but come back without the antidote she would not, in spite of the alarms of her present position. For the knowledge of these she was in large measure indebted to Ibrahim, who, for a professed fatalist, had an extraordinary fondness for prophesying evil, and communicated all his anticipations of danger most faithfully to Rahah. Consequently, when Rahah came running back in much excitement one evening, after taking Ibrahim his supper, her mistress was not affected by her news to the extent she had expected.

"O my lady, Ibrahim says he is sure some evil is going to happen. Several messengers have come in during the day, bringing news to Khadija, and he is certain that one of them was from Kubbet-ul-Haj. And Khadija has been going round among the men here, stirring them up against the English, and they have all got out their weapons, and they are cleaning their muskets and sharpening their swords. Ibrahim knows that they must be going to kill us to-morrow—at least, he says so; but I bade him tell the men of the vengeance the English would take on them if any ill befell us, and of the great power and eagerness for war of the Major Sahib, and how he was going to marry you. I said it very loud, so that Khadija might hear, for she was not far off, but she only laughed."

"She was probably amused by your suspicions of her," said Georgia absently. The fact that she had been able this evening to alter the dressings on Zeynab's foot, and allow the wound to close, was much more interesting to her just now than Ibrahim's suspicions. If all continued to go on as well as hitherto, she ought to be able to return in triumph to Bir-ul-Malik in a day or two with the all-important antidote.

Rahah shook her head over her mistress's lack of interest in her great news, and watched jealously for an opportunity of proving that her own excitement had been justified. She found one the very next day, and immediately rushed once more into Georgia's room with her veil flying behind her.

"O my lady, there is really something wrong! Ibrahim is gone—at least, I cannot find him—and when I asked the men where he was, they only laughed at me and reviled me. And there are watchmen upon the towers, making signs to one another, and all the men and boys are gathered together with their weapons in their hands, and the women and children are sharpening knives and talking of plunder. What shall we do?"

"We can't do anything, except keep quiet and show no fear," said Georgia. "I don't think they would have needed so much stirring up to attack two women, Rahah. No doubt they are not thinking of us at all. Very likely they know that some of the wild tribes intend to attack the place, and they are preparing to defend it. Perhaps Ibrahim is helping them down at the gate. Whatever you do, don't look frightened."

"Frightened!" said Rahah with high scorn, and sat down in the corner to polish Georgia's instruments. A little later, Khadija entered, and asked Rahah to go and sit beside Zeynab and amuse her, since she seemed restless, and she herself was anxious to take the doctor-lady into the garden, and point out to her some of its beauties. Rahah looked appealingly at her mistress, entreating her mutely not to accept the invitation, but Georgia was firm in the principles she had just enunciated. Any show of fear or suspicion would only serve to irritate Khadija and put her on her guard, and

moreover, if her intentions were evil, she could carry them out as well in the house as out of doors. Her decision seemed to be justified by the old woman's behaviour, for she hobbled along beside her, talking as pleasantly as an ingrained habit of snappishness would permit her, and appeared anxious to exhibit the different nooks and arbours which formed the chief attraction of the garden. Georgia could not understand nearly all she said, but an emphatic word now and then, eked out by signs, gave her some idea when admiration was expected of her, and the walk was marred by no difference of opinion.

Passing through the garden, they came at last to one of the watch-towers of which Rahah had spoken, perched upon the crest of the hill, and overlooking the great gateway and the paved court, containing the famous well and surrounded by stables and other outbuildings, into which it opened. Khadija proposed that they should ascend the tower and look at the view, and Georgia acquiesced at once in the suggestion. To her surprise, the summit was occupied by several men armed to the teeth, in addition to the watchman, but these made way without a word for the two women, and they stood looking out on the desert. The view thus obtained was a very wide one, and Georgia noticed at once a distant cloud of dust, which appeared to be approaching the place. Khadija's eyes were also fixed upon this cloud, and Georgia concluded that it must denote the position of the invading band against whom the warlike preparations were being made.

For some time those on the top of the tower stood watching the dust-cloud without uttering a word. As it came nearer, there were occasional glimpses of moving men and animals and the momentary flash of steel, and Georgia felt that the men were crowding behind her and fairly panting with excitement.

"O doctor-lady," said Khadija, "thou seest these horsemen. Knowest thou who they are?"

"They ride in order. No doubt they are soldiers."

"Is that all? Look again, O doctor-lady."

"They wear turbans—some of them, at least. They have lances with pennons. They seem to be in uniform. It is dark, like the uniform of the Khemistan Horse. They are the Khemistan Horse!"

"Look again, O doctor-lady!"

Georgia looked. The cloud of dust had become much more transparent as it approached, and the forms of the mounted men could be clearly discerned. There were two or three officers among them, and Georgia's gaze was riveted on the foremost. From the moment she had obtained her first glimpse of him through the flying dust, it had seemed to her that there was something familiar in his appearance, and now, as she bent over the parapet and shaded her eyes with her hand, she knew that she had not been mistaken. It was Dick, leaning forward on his horse, as though from utter weariness, and looking neither to right nor left as he rode.

"Thou seest now, O doctor-lady?" asked Khadija.

"Yes, I see; but what of that?"

"Only this—and this." Khadija's bony finger pointed first to a spot some distance in advance of the little British column, where the track wound through rocky ground, with sand-cliffs of some height rising on either side—the dry bed of a winter torrent, probably—then to the force as it marched. "All the men of Bir-ul-Malikat in ambush there, O doctor lady, and here the English riding into the ambushade without knowing of it."

"But why have you brought me here?" asked Georgia.

Khadija understood the tone of the question, though not its words.

"To see what happens, O doctor-lady. Not to warn thy friends—oh, no! One cry—one sign of warning—and thou diest. Thou seest these men here. Their daggers are ready, and they fear not to use them."

Georgia stood looking over the parapet, with both hands gripping its rough edge. The situation was quite clear to her without the aid of Khadija's words, which she understood only partially, and there was no doubt in her mind as to the course to be taken. Behind were the daggers of the fanatics, who were Khadija's willing tools, in front, Dick and his comrades, riding unconscious to their doom. Of course she would warn them. They were almost level with the tower now, as she stood with beating heart making her hurried calculation. The warning must necessarily be the work of a moment, for there would be no more time allowed her. One moment to tear off her *burka* and wave it wildly as a signal, and to shriek "Dick! ambush!" using her hands as a speaking-trumpet. She knew the extraordinary distance to which voices are carried by the dry desert air, and she had no fear as to his hearing her.

But, as she stood waiting for the critical moment, with her hands already raised to fling off the *burka*, a sudden disturbing thought came to her. Why had Khadija brought her to that spot at that moment, when she must know her well enough by this time to be sure that she would at least make an attempt to warn the column of its danger? Was it not possible that for some reason or other she wished her to give the alarm? It was an awful moment, but Georgia's whole training had been such as to inculcate presence of mind and prompt decision in emergencies. Just as the British force reached the point at which she had determined that her warning should be given, she turned her back deliberately on the desert; and, sitting down on the parapet, buried her face in her hands.

"Ah, the doctor-lady is *prudent*!" said Khadija, in a low snarl of intense rage. But Georgia scarcely heard her. She was praying as she had never prayed before, and at the same time listening intently for any sound of conflict. For, after all, she might have decided wrongly. At last she could bear the uncertainty no longer, and looked round. The dreaded *nullah* had been reached, and the troops were passing through it without opposition, two or three

dismounted men scrambling along the brink on either side as scouts. There was no ambuscade there, at all events. Almost before she had had time to realise the full significance of this, the gleam of a weapon in the courtyard below her caught her attention, and she became aware that the outbuildings around it were filled with armed men crouching low, while the gate was standing partially open. There had been a trap laid here, that was evident, for a low growl of concentrated anger rose to her ears, as the liers-in-wait began to perceive that the prey had escaped them. Then the sound was echoed by the men on the tower, as they drew their daggers and turned towards Georgia with words and looks which intimated that here they had, at any rate, a scapegoat for their disappointment. With a calmness which surprised herself, she did not even spring to her feet, but remarked quietly to Khadija :

"Zeynab is not yet recovered, and Yakub is still at Bir-ul-Malik."

With a muttered curse the old woman pushed her way through the group and ordered the men back. They obeyed sulkily, and Georgia, struck by the humour of the situation, and the utter discomfiture of her enemies, began to laugh. She laughed until the tears came into her eyes, and the men looked at one another and muttered, "She is certainly mad," while Khadija, with disappointed hate depicted on her face, motioned to her to return to the house. Still laughing weakly, Georgia obeyed, and found her way back to Rahah, to whom she recounted what had happened during the last half-hour. Deeply interested, the girl promised to do her best to unravel the mystery, and when evening came, she returned to her mistress overflowing with news.

"O my lady, I have found it all out. I have seen Ibrahim. He is set free now, but they had shut him up in a dungeon, that he should not warn the Major Sahib, because he had discovered their plans, and he says that all the men are cursing you. The messenger from Fath-ud-Din yesterday brought orders that on no account were his servants to attack the English, for that then his life would be forfeited, but Khadija could not bear to lose her revenge when she had so nearly obtained it, and she thought it would be all right if she could make the English attack first. She wanted you to cry out, O my lady, because she thought that the Major Sahib would know your voice, and, thinking you were a prisoner and in danger, would rush to save you. The men in the courtyard were told to shut the gate when as many as possible of the English had come in, and to kill them if they resisted—as naturally they would. Then she could not be held to blame if the servants killed the English, who had forced their way into the place and provoked a fight, or if you were found to have fallen from the tower in trying to reach the Major Sahib. But you have brought all her plans to nothing, and the Major Sahib ought to be proud that he will have such a wife."

(To be concluded.)

A BALLADE OF TIEF-BLAU WASSER.

[“A funny German girl was on the train with us on the St. Gothard. She was very plain, awkward, but her dream was to find deep blue water. She had been in Venice two days, at the Lago Maggiore three, but she did not care for them—the water was not blue. She had heard that at the Insel Veit (do you recognise your island? [Isle of Wight]) the water was *tief-blau*. Was it really true, and would she be able to take beautiful walks in woods and gaze at it? I felt obliged to tell her that it might not always be blue.”—*Extract from a letter written September 21, 1894.*]

I.

AH! forth she went to seek the blue,
The deep, deep blue of ocean pure:
A plain, fair German maiden true—
A little squat, you may be sure—
With mind and heart no art may lure,
With fair intents like flowerets sweet,
Whose leaves, tho' crushed, will still endure,
With grateful airs for all they meet.

II.

Ah! she may never find her due
In water blue enough to cure
Her longing all the wide world thro',
If her ideal, more mature,
Will lead her till strange lands be fewer.
Nor would you such fair minds entreat
To end the quest, which will secure
Such grateful airs for all they meet.

III.

Yet in her eyes of softest hue,
If, in a moment, sad, demure,
The moisture rise, you have the blue—
A blue to which sea-blue is poor,
Tho' skies were never clearer, bluer—
In fair exchange so chaste and sweet,
Here deepest blue you can procure,
With grateful airs for all you meet.

ENVOI.

Fair German maid, than you none truer,
You seek, yet can but find defeat;
You have what does your heart allure,
With grateful airs for all you meet.

ALEX. H. JAPP.

DEER-STALKING IN NEWFOUNDLAND.

DRIVING the other afternoon past a lovely Derbyshire demesne, I saw groups of demure undersized deer browsing, and my thoughts sped away with me to an old colony not much known even yet, save that its misfortunes financial, fiery and French have given it some little notoriety.

A recent writer complains that the dogs of the St. Bernard Hospice have a better reputation than they deserve. Credited with being four-legged good Samaritans, they are really thieves.

Perhaps the Newfoundland dog is not always the heroic beast we deem him. I will not, however, be a party to giving a dog a bad name.

Certain it is, though, that the reputed home of our shaggy favourite has been persistently misrepresented. Passengers on American liners plunging into fogs, dodging spectral-looking bergs, chilled to the marrow by harsh winds off the ice-floes, attribute all their misery to the unlucky island hard by.

But let it be said that not seldom is Newfoundland bathed in floods of sunlight from Cape Bauld to Cape Race, whilst on "the Banks," fog-horns frantically blowing "answer each other in the mist," and voyagers, American and English, are inwardly abusing the poor colony as though it generated fogs, and flung icebergs into the sea, and blew chilly from its bold coast.

To defend the island against the aspersions of all and sundry is no purpose of mine now, but I know at least one particular in which it may be backed against all competitors. It is veritably a sportsman's paradise. Its streams abound with trout and salmon. The lakes or ponds, as they are usually called, though very expansive sheets of water, have many of them been stocked with the famous Loch Leven trout, but the native pink-fleshed fish is considered an even greater delicacy. The tracks of the Canadian hare literally cover the newly-fallen snow in the woods, and any little fisher-lad going half a mile inshore and setting his snares over-night is sure of his prey in the morning. Of birds, black-duck, grouse, geese, curlew, there is positively no limit. And if anybody knows a dainty more delicate than a dish of curlew, fattened on the berries that bestrew the heaths and marshes of Newfoundland, I would gladly accept an invitation to dine with him.

In my travels round the coast I frequently spent a night in a trapper's "tilt;" not in his bed, thank you, as cleanliness is not one of his traits; but coiled up in my great coat on the hearthrug or settle.

Their dogs share the house with them. Their traps, guns, and nets are the sole stock-in-trade. Dried salmon and hard biscuit are their chief articles of diet. Ambition is usually dead in them. As a rule little effort is made to scrape more than a bare livelihood together, and they live from hand to mouth. A really energetic trapper, whose isolation has not caused him to degenerate into a slovenly, spiritless animal, may easily make money. Where only a mere subsistence is won, the man is generally responsible for his own penury. I have often popped into a furrier's hut, and found him in high glee, because a silver hair or a black fox, worth from twelve to twenty pounds, had unwarily put his foot in Nimrod's trap. The patch and yellow fox they set small store by, as their market value is but a few shillings.

From a sportsman's point of view, Newfoundland gains especial interest from the fact that it is the home of the caribou. He may have swum across the straits of Belle Isle, or he may be indigenous; at any rate there he is in droves, and so long as the island remains sparsely settled, the noble breed will run no risk of extinction.

The colonists have no objection to foreigners shooting over their unrivalled preserves, and an increasing number of leisured Englishmen are availing themselves of the privilege.

Just two thousand miles from Liverpool, St. John's is reached after a seven days' sail in an "Allan" boat. The vessels of this well-known fleet make fortnightly calls. The fare does not exceed fifteen pounds. Once landed, no attempt is made to fleece the stranger. Hotel charges are reasonable, and until quite recently no gratuities were looked for.

Facilities for railway travel are extending, and in comfortable cars of the American pattern, the sportsman may be taken through charming scenery, almost to the haunts of the caribou. Formerly, it was necessary to take another short sea voyage in coastal steamers plying east or west.

The privilege to kill *ad lib.* was sadly abused a few years back, and one heard of distinguished Englishmen leaving dozens of carcasses tainting the air, till the carrion picked them clean; the sole reason for the wanton slaughter being the desire to secure fine antlers for the dining-rooms and halls of stately English homes.

A set of game laws drawn up by a group of intelligent sportsmen, and patriots in St. John's, some of whom are friends of my own, have received the assent of the government; and whilst in future there will be ample scope for decent sport, wholesale slaughter and brutal carnage, and purposeless violation of the forest sanctuary, will not be so easy.

The law as regards the caribou runs thus:—

Close season is from 1st Feb. to 15th July, and from 7th Oct. to 10th Nov. inclusive. That is to say caribou or deer may be hunted upon and after the 15th July till the 7th day of October, and from

the 10th day of November till 1st February following. Penalty for violation of above four hundred dollars.

No person not usually resident in the colony shall kill or take caribou without having first procured therefor to himself a licence, issued for the season as hereinafter provided, and shall pay for such licence an annual fee of one hundred dollars, under a penalty of four hundred dollars. Provided nevertheless, that no resident or officer of any British warship stationed on the coast of this island for fisheries protection, shall be compelled to procure or pay for such annual licence.

No one person shall, during any one season, kill or take more than three stag and two hind caribou under a penalty of four hundred dollars. No venison allowed to be exported as an article of commerce; and any person exporting or carrying with him for private use, any venison or the heads, antlers, or skins, must clear the same at the Custom House.

Dogs, pitfalls, snares, and traps are prohibited.

Hitherto there have been no limitations, an advantage in the eyes of butchers, but not in the opinion of men who have the instincts of true sportsmen. It was, under the old régime, but a matter of time, and the monarch of the forest would be missing from his native glen. This from the point of view of the picturesque would surely be a pity. More than this, it meant the cutting off of an important item in the fisherman's food supply, and colonial statesmen felt it incumbent upon them to legislate in the interests of their own people.

Now that necessary limitations have been imposed, to the average Englishman who may with the landowner's permission shoot a stray rabbit that nibbles his barley, or bag a brace or two of partridges, or bowl over the rooks that hold their clamorous parliament in the elms by his own front door, the prospect of bringing five pairs of antlers home, and feasting on juicy steaks of venison in primeval forests, and shooting ptarmigan and geese to his heart's content, without let or hindrance, is a particularly attractive one.

It is long enough since I shot a stag, so for an up-to-date story of deer-stalking in Newfoundland, I cull from the diary of an old acquaintance.

My friend gives the preference to Indians as guides on expeditions of this sort, though any number of fairly reliable white men may be found.

On this occasion three strapping Indians accompanied his party. The Micmac is tall, well formed and active; he can carry an enormous load on his back, can endure great fatigue, and privation, and any amount of cold. The people of this tribe have skin of a very dingy hue, coarse jet black hair, and dark hazel eyes. On the hunting grounds the Micmac is a marvel of sagacity. With nothing in the world to guide him, he with unerring instinct, finds his way from place to place, and hardly deviates a hand-breadth, however far apart

the places lie. The route may be utterly strange to him but he may be trusted not to lose his way.

You may not understand his language, but he talks to his comrades in speech like the soft flow of a river, and his chatter occasions you no annoyance. He knows all the English he needs for your purposes. Incidents my friend deemed hardly worth noting in his log, were the shooting of as many partridges and ducks as they liked; the bringing down of a large goshawk, a bird of a deep brown colour, with white breast, thickly-feathered head and legs, and powerful claws; and eighteen wild geese cleverly "toled" by the Indians.

But they were soon to meet larger game.

One morning when they were sauntering leisurely through the woods, a long low whistle was heard from the foremost Indian, who pointed to some rising ground in the distance, on which a big black object was clearly discernible, and said: "Big bear dere. Big bear dere."

After three quarters of an hour's hard running they got five hundred yards to the leeward of Bruin. Then the stalking commenced, and the party, unnoticed by the bear, who was taking his fill of blueberries, were soon within two hundred yards of their noble quarry.

So entirely unconcerned was he, so unconscious of the dose of lead soon to be lodged in his thick hide, that they with little difficulty drew still nearer till he could be observed in every detail. His immense body was covered with a glossy coat of raven blackness. He was fully furred from head to tail. On each side of his muzzle was a tawny patch. His eyes set low in his head were black and twinkling, and gave some indication of the slumbering ferocity of his disposition.

They were within about a hundred yards of him when the bear suddenly cocked his ears with a presentiment of something wrong; the next moment the contents of the right barrel were lodged in his fore-leg. Giving a tremendous roar he sprang into the air and then tore the wounded limb with his teeth. His sufferings were not prolonged, a bullet from the left barrel finished him.

The bear proved to be an old one, and very large, and it was with considerable difficulty the three Indians turned him over on his back. They estimated his weight at four hundred pounds. He was skinned from the nose to the tail, the claws being left on the paws. The teeth of the monster were kept to show to the youngsters. The fine skin was much admired on the return of the sportsmen to town.

That night the whole party supped off bear steak; the white men pronounced it not a patch on beaver, and scarcely equal to musquash stew from which they had dined on the banks of the Grand Pond no great while before. But if they had qualified pleasure in discussing grilled bear, the Indians smacked their lips over it, and are believed to have eaten several pounds apiece before they fell into probably unquiet slumber.

Now the party were all eager for the deer, and resolved to go after them in different directions. They tossed for choice and the doctor won. Peter, his Indian, advised going towards "the Tolt" in a north-easterly direction. The other section of the party had the Middle Tilt, and Sandy Harbour river ground.

Bidding each other good luck till they should meet again in two or three days' time, they separated. We will follow my friend and his two Indians, John and Loney, meanwhile wishing the doctor good sport.

The big Indian, with springy step, his heavy load notwithstanding, led the way, and the other dusky fellow, bearing a hundred pounds on his back, brought up the rear.

After a journey of three hours, during which they had seen a small stag and two or three wandering does, but saved their powder, they came to "Middle Tilt Ground," a spot too desolate to camp in; but they boiled the kettle for the inevitable cup of tea, and rested a while. They saw several coveys of partridges, but refrained from shooting lest the country should be disturbed, and their hearts were set on getting a big stag.

Their pipes lighted, they pushed on again, and were within about six miles of their intended camping-ground at Sandy Harbour, when Loney touched the white man's arm and said, "Me see two deer walkin' dere," pointing to some small marshes at some distance to the east. The others looked, but saw nothing; even the deer-stalking glass did not help them.

"Are you sure you saw deer?" my friend asked.

"Yes, certin sure. You come me, me show you; may be big stag."

Loney brought them to the spot where he affirmed he saw the deer, but alas! no trace was found but the tracks over the trampled marshberries.

It had been a fagging chase through scrub and marsh, and the foiled stalkers were a little out of humour; but being in capital training, they were equal to anything, and set off northwards, Loney explaining:

"Deer move on; travel bit. Soon get shot."

After a good deal of nasty walking, the Indian, with unbounded delight, exclaimed, pointing off to the westward:

"Dere the deer. O my! big stag. Plenty doe."

And sure enough there they were in a large marsh, a big stag with at least twenty does around him, some feeding, some lying down and lazily chewing the cud.

About three hundred yards to the windward stood another fine stag, with very fair antlers, but not to be compared to the "master of the harem." Now and then the smaller stag would move towards the other, when the big chap would dash at him, and the noise of their clashing antlers made the welkin ring. At last the smaller

beast would retire, and take up his position as before—a quiet spectator.

Meanwhile the three men were crawling on as quietly as possible, and getting gradually withing range. Loney, pointing to a small cluster of juniper trees, said :

"You crawl dere ; long shot ; but we stay here too long. Maybe odder stag wind us. You go, I foller."

Worming themselves gently along, they reached the junipers. A couple of cartridges were rammed in loaded with solid bullets. The big stag was still too far off, and standing head on. Loney, on his knees just behind the white man, said :

"Minute me tole."

And as the stag was still a full two hundred yards away, a distance too great to be sure of killing, there was nothing for it but for the Indian to "tole" the splendid game within reach of the eager rifle, which was held at full cock.

At Loney's first grunt "his majesty" gave a jump, threw his enormous antlers up and began to sniff the wind. Presently *he* gave a grunt, and, thinking that another stag had come to interfere with his harem, trotted a bit to leeward to try and wind his coming enemy.

Caribou always endeavour to get to leeward of any danger as quickly as possible, and the stalker must prevent this if he can.

"Me tole gen," the Indian says, and this time he grunts a challenge, which brings the stag within a hundred yards, and broad-side to the rifle.

The trigger is pulled, and thud goes the bullet through the magnificent brute's body behind the fore-shoulder. The big fellow gave two or three grunts and died ; the sad-eyed does ran off into the glades, but no shot followed them. It seemed a pity to rob such a splendid herd of their head, but my friend and his party felt little remorse for having extinguished life in the huge animal. What an immense brute he looked as he lay on the marsh, with the blood oozing out of his side ; and what antlers he had ! There were forty-three points, on every one of which one could hang one's watch.

Five miles' tramp in drenching rain and through unspeakable bogs, with no pathway of any sort, brought them to Sandy Harbour River, across which they waded waist deep. Having changed and dried themselves before a roaring fire, they supped on such unconventional dainties as marrow-bones and deer's tongue ; then, coiled in their blankets, fell asleep to repeat in their dreams the exciting stalk of the day.

Sandy Harbour River proved a first-rate place to camp, and there, a few days later, they were joined by the doctor's party, who had also had as good sport as they could desire, shooting four splendid stags beside black ducks and wild geese *galore*. Next day some hungry, ill-clad fishermen from a poor settlement in the bottom of

Fortune Bay, Grand Le Pierre, came into camp, and the sportsmen put them on the track of the deer meat, not a pound of which was wasted. Seventeen miles from the coast, and, satisfied with their sport, our stalking friends resolved to bend their steps towards home.

The weather was exquisite. The scenery was enchanting. The air was filled with delicate blue haze. There was a subtle stillness. Delicious perfume was distilled from the leaves of the sweet fern. The forest foliage was of every tint from burnished gold to brilliant crimson. To live was all the delight one asked. It was the Indian summer of the north. But storm comes on the heels of calm, and while this brief interlude of perfect weather lasts they had better decamp.

Altogether the outing lasted a month, and the deer-stalkers, after haunting the sylvan shrines, came back refreshed in mind and body to the prosaic concerns of life. For aught I know, the Indians, Peter and Loney and John, are still waiting to guide adventurous Englishmen through the forest mazes to the home of the caribou on "the barrens" and by the great lakes.

MORT D'ÉTÉ.

WERE it only a gleam or a spark,
Of the light that for ever has fled—
I stretch out my hands in the dark,
For the summer is dead!

Bright youth with its sun-tinted way,
Fair seed-time and harvest all o'er;
I stand at the close of the day
On the winnowing floor.

There were grasses that waved in the wind,
There were blossoms and fruit on the tree,
Red roses? I left them behind,
For they were not for me!

How golden for some was the grain!
How rich the ripe vintage—and fair
The blossoms that hung on the wain—
But *my* garner is bare!

Were it only a gleam or a spark
Of the light that for ever has fled—
I stretch out my hands in the dark,
For the summer is dead!

AGNES E. GLASE.

A PRINCESS IN THE MOUNTAINS.

PRINCESS BEATRICE, commonly called Bice * by those who loved her, had been sent to the mountains at the suggestion of her grandmother, the widowed grand duchess of Schleiz Robenstein, as a punishment for unruly behaviour during her first year of grown-up life at the court of Grüningen. She had shown a decided lack of the dignity necessary to her exalted position, an appalling tendency to disregard all etiquette and ceremony, in fact a strong disposition to kick over the traces. Undoubtedly, the great lady argued in excuse of her conduct, it was a drawback to have possessed an Italian mother, even though she had died at her birth, and it was unfortunate too, that she had been sadly indulged by her father up to the time of his death. Had he lived he would have been reigning grand duke instead of his younger brother Theodore, and there is no knowing to what length his daughter would then have gone in her love of independence. As it was, her uncle was far too ready to forgive her her wilfulness.

The punishments assigned to princesses probably are, as their lives, different to those of ordinary people. It certainly did not seem very terrible to be obliged to spend two months of freedom in one of the wildest and most beautiful countries in Europe.

Rosenhain was a small paradise in itself; it had been built by a prince of Schleiz Robenstein for his delicate wife, and since had served as health resort, play-ground or haven of rest, as the case might be, to many a member of the same august family, when nature demanded a respite from the conventionality of the "Residenz" and the toil of court life.

It lay on the shores of an emerald and sapphire lake, a chalet-like building with large wooden balconies and striped red and white marquees, half hidden amongst mysterious gardens which formed an oasis in the midst of the rugged rocks and dark pine woods, above which gleamed the eternal snows.

The warders attached to this house of correction were two carefully selected *dames d'honneur*, Countess Rodheim, a handsome, stately elderly lady and Baroness Leopoldine Malden, eight-and-twenty, sandy-haired, sandy-complexioned, with eyes of the palest blue, who was supposed to look seriously at life and to realise its responsibilities.

The cleverest people are sometimes deceived.

The grand duchess had chosen the countess because she was convinced that in her she possessed a true follower, one who would carry out her wishes to the utmost of her power, but she did not

* Pronounced "Beechay."

suspect that when outside the magic circle of her glance, the good lady could relax considerably, and that a certain easy good-nature and constitutional indolence made her rather the opposite of what her royal mistress had imagined. Nor was the latter aware of the fact that since the baroness's engagement to a young officer of the Austrian guard, she had developed an abnormal sentimentality which coloured everything and deprived her of any common sense she may have originally possessed. So the old countess did fancy work and dozed and hardly ever went beyond the garden, while Baroness Leopoldine wrote copious letters to her lover, and gazed at the moon. As may be supposed, instead of suffering the constraint intended, Princess Bice was left to follow her own sweet will, and was subservient to no one but old Heinemann, the head lackey, whose despotism was as thorough and complete as that of the grand duchess herself.

The girls scoured the country on their ponies and climbed the mountains; they even succeeded sometimes in ridding themselves of Heinemann, who was growing old and found walking a weariness to the flesh.

One day they experienced a real *bonâ fide* adventure, an adventure to be told even to Countess Rodheim with reservations. They had determined to walk to the Wenden-alp, so they equipped themselves in the neatest of climbing garments, gaiters, thick boots, short grey cloth skirts, jäger hats, etc., took their alpenstocks and started in high spirits, rejoicing especially in the fact that a young servant by name Lorenz was their only chaperon.

Even Baroness Leopoldine was a capital walker, and they climbed with real good will. Up, up, through cool silent firwoods, across flower-strewn meadows, by bubbling streams and rocky causeways.

Sunshine was in the air; but sunshine does not always last, and before the Wenden-alp was reached, the clouds gathered, thunder rolled and echoed amongst the giant peaks, and the rain came down in torrents. The ladies arrived at the "senn-hütte"* in a very limp and dragged condition.

Lorenz had strict injunctions not to betray their incognito, and for that reason he himself had been ordered to discard his livery and to appear as an ordinary "bursch,"† which character he assumed without difficulty. The "sennerin,"‡ a stout, merry buxom lass, was only too pleased at such an unexpected break in the monotony of her life. Like most of her kind she was not the least embarrassed, but received them with a shout of laughter, clapping her hands with amusement at their forlorn appearance. She soon brought out her best clothes, and in less than half an hour Princess Bice and Baroness Leopoldine found themselves transformed into the smartest and neatest of milkmaids.

The former was delighted; she pirouetted round the room and stood

* Milkmaid's hut.

† Lad.

‡ Milkmaid.

on a chair in a vain attempt to view herself at full length in the very small glass which hung against the wall with a bunch of alpine flowers behind it.

Leopoldine laughed too, but she was less pleased; the green petticoat, sandy red with scarlet was pretty enough, and the bodice with silver chains, but the stockings were coarse, and the shoes large and rough and not becoming to her little dainty feet.

The princess cared not a scrap, she watched the *sennerin* put a pan of milk on the fire, then she spied a zither in a corner, and in another minute their hostess was seated at a table, the instrument before her, and the strains of a *Ländler* floated through the room.

"Ah Leo, Leo, allow me!" she cried. She seized her companion round the waist, and holding out her short skirt with the other hand, she proceeded to dance the quaint jerky waltz that Tyrolese peasants delight in.

The fun grew fast and furious, her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled she shouted and snapped her fingers until she even made Leopoldine share her enthusiasm. The *sennerin* cried "Bravo."

Suddenly a sense of something unusual made them pause; they both grew crimson. The door had been opened quietly, within it stood two men in shooting dress, their faces brimming over with amusement. Had they been ordinary *jäger** or peasants, the princess would have probably continued her dance and have called to them to join, for she knew the mountain people, and that they can be treated with equality by those above them in station, yet not presume or forget their position. There is a natural nobility in those high latitudes, an absence of artificiality that is refreshing. But it was undoubted that the new-comers belonged to a different class altogether. The most prominent of the two, who was shaking with suppressed laughter and who now applauded loudly, was strikingly handsome, tall and aristocratic-looking, with a small military moustache and fair short hair, which the damp had caused to curl in a manner most becoming.

The other who stood more in the background appeared to be older; his face was grave, but his amusement showed itself in his eyes. In fact they were his only noticeable feature; a pair of large grey eyes.

The tall young man proceeded to apologise, and to explain that they had missed their *jäger* and were very hungry. Might they venture to demand hospitality of the amiable ladies of the *sennhütte*?

Baroness Leopoldine was horrified at the situation, and hoped every minute to see Princess Bice retire with a distant bow to the small closet where they had changed their clothes. But that young lady rose to the occasion at once; no sooner did she imagine that the gentlemen took her and her friend for genuine peasant girls than the excitement of adventure filled her veins as champagne. To the

* Hunters.

other's great distress, she replied that they were about to have some refreshment, and she hoped their visitors—who were most welcome—would join. Rosel, the real mistress of the hut, at once grasped the position of affairs with a quick sense of humour very common in the merry mountain folk. She poured the hot milk into wooden bowls and placed black bread and cheese and butter on the table. All seated themselves and set to work to enjoy their frugal meal.

The baroness was in despair. She was painfully conscious of her responsibilities, and it was most evident to her that the strangers did not for a moment take them for milkmaids (she would have been more shocked had she known that in reality they were well aware of their identity); visions of the grand duchess rose before her, she drew herself up and surveyed the scene in dignified and embarrassed silence.

The princess took upon herself to play the part of hostess; she buttered and cut the large long-shaped loaf in a truly professional fashion, embracing it with one arm, and perilously slicing it, the knife towards her. The young men watched her with amusement and admiration, she looked so dainty, so ultra-refined in the dark heavy peasant-dress, relieved only by its silver ornaments. She was so unconscious too, so intent on her work, and so eager.

"There!" she cried at last. "That's done; now, gentlemen, set to and reward my labours."

Leopoldine gasped.

"And do the charming *sennerinnen* never feel dull, all the summer on the heights with nothing to do but look after cows?" asked the fair man, his eyes twinkling.

"Do the *Herrn Jäger* ever tire of hunting the chamois?"

"Ah, that is different."

"By no means; at least, not altogether. There is the study of nature, the mountain air, the flowers, the freedom—ah, above all, the freedom!"

"You are an advocate for freedom, for the emancipation of women, perhaps?"

"Yes—ah, yes; if I had my way I would travel without even a maid, I would ride races, I would drive four-in-hand, I would hunt, I would introduce the 'divided skirt,' as the English call the new costume!"

"But the lovely *sennerin* knows English! The advance of education is indeed wonderful."

Princess Bice blushed very red, and then she burst out laughing.

"One must play a part sometimes," she said apologetically, with slight confusion, and continued: "Grandmamma thinks——"

But what particular precept of that august lady's she had been about to disclose was lost to the assembled company, for Baroness Malden was seized suddenly with such a violent fit of coughing, that the thread of the conversation was lost.

The latter lady was becoming more and more nervous, and it

seemed to her that the eyes of the other man were fixed on her unreasonable charge with an expression of mockery, not to say disapproval as she continued to give her opinion on various subjects with appalling audacity. "They may be anybody," Leopoldine thought with a shudder—"Müller, Meyer! These bourgeois, when they have 'served,' often manage to look almost distinguished." She sprang up directly the last spoonful of milk disappeared down the princess's throat.

"We must be going," she said with emphasis. "Our clothes are dry; I hear Lorenz outside, and it is fine—the storm is over."

"Oh, but, ladies, another dance, I beg!" cried the fair man, "in which we may perhaps be privileged to join."

Princess Bice was delighted.

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed. "Rosel, the zither."

The baroness took a step forward, but before she could speak, the elder of the strangers put his hand on his friend's arm and said something quietly that made him draw back with a bow and a remark to the effect that there was after all hardly time.

The princess, like an excited child, without a moment's thought, turned on the other man. "By what right do you interfere, sir!" she cried with temper, accentuating her words by an impatient stamp of the foot. He looked at her, their eyes met, and hers sank; perhaps she realised that as her grandmother would have said, she was forgetting her position. When she raised them again, he was bowing low.

"A thousand pardons, gnädiges fräulein," he said. "I am unfortunate in incurring your displeasure, but our jäger has missed us, and much as we should have liked——"

She interrupted. "Thank you," she answered haughtily, "I understand," and without another word she walked away and followed Leopoldine into the cupboard.

"I hate that man," she said. "I hate him! He looked shocked the whole time, and he was laughing at me; I saw it, and it made me talk the more to show him how little I cared. I know what he whispered to his friend had nothing to do with the jäger!"

When they emerged, fully equipped for their homeward journey, they found the gentlemen had already departed. They had left messages of regret and apology, Rosel explained; he, with the dark moustache, had come back in order to bid her warn the ladies not to descend by the Luciansteg, as doubtless the stream near the Rosenberg would be heavy and impassable.

Princess Bice drew herself up.

"It was extremely kind of him," she said, "but I think I know the mountains as well as he does. I should not dream of altering my plans. It would have been more polite to have waited and to have inquired if they could be of any assistance."

As they crossed the Green Alps *en route* for the Luciansteg, this was still rankling in her mind.

"It was all that disagreeable man, I am sure," she remarked. "The other would have waited to say good-bye."

Baroness Malden was silent; she felt uneasy, and was only too thankful to have got rid of the two young men with so little difficulty.

The princess had spoken the truth in saying that she knew the mountains well; she had ridden or walked as a child over every path and track. She remembered a certain ridge of stones across a narrow part of the wetterbach* they wished to pass, and determined that the rain on the hills had not been sufficient to swell the stream to dangerous proportions. Lorenz was also of the same opinion, but before long they found that it would have been better to have followed the advice of their new friends. The water was tearing down, and the stones were covered.

Poor Baroness Leopoldine, worn out and disappointed at the thought of having to retrace their steps, sat down on a bank and began to reflect that it was not always an advantage to be without Heinemann; she did not feel equal to combating the wilfulness of her royal charge.

"Ye can get across with help," the latter said. "Lorenz shall run to the nearest house for someone; we cannot walk all the way back."

And so it was decided; but the servant had not gone five minutes before the girls saw the two gentlemen jäger coming down the path towards them. Apparently, from their wet boots and gaiters, they had already tried the stream.

They stopped, and, lifting their hats, asked if they could help the ladies. They strongly advised them to retreat. Leopoldine was most anxious to do so, but she saw a look on Princess Bice's face that warned her not to press the matter.

The strangers, however, were ignorant of these under-currents, and quite unaware that her annoyance with one of them at least had not subsided. They proceeded to put forth arguments the opposite of convincing to the perverse young lady who listened with undisguised impatience.

At last she sprang away and up the bank with the swiftness of a roe. The baroness's dress had become hopelessly entangled in a brier; she was suffering from keen mental depression, the result of realising fully that she must be looking her worst, that her fringe was out of curl, and her hat on one side. This was a distress even in the presence of a Müller or a Meyer; but her duty was plain.

"Go after her!" she cried. "She is capable of anything, gracious powers!"

The handsome fair man was helping to free her garments; it was the other who followed the princess.

* A mountain torrent which descends after a storm.

Half a dozen strides brought him to her side ; she was standing at the edge of the stream, where two boulders still held their own, and a broken rail hung suspended half across the water.

They looked into each other's eyes for a moment, as if to measure each other's strength.

"Do you mean to defy me ; you are but a child," the grey ones seemed to say. "I always have my own way ; I mean to have it now," the brown ones answered.

The following dialogue ensued, he below still gazing up at her with a certain amusement ; she erect and angry, poised on the rock, one hand grasping the rail.

"Gnädiges fräulein, it is dangerous ; I beg you will not try to cross."

"Thank you ; *you* have done so twice. I am glad to say I am not made of sugar."

"If you will permit me, I will carry you over in safety."

"Certainly not ; I should not think of such a thing. I intend to cross alone."

Then seeing her determination, he came a step forward and put his hand on her arm with an air of authority ; his voice grew grave, almost stern as he answered :

"I am sorry, fräulein, I cannot allow it ; you must not attempt it."

This was enough ; she shook off his detaining hand.

"*Must* not !" she cried ; the brown eyes flashed, all the spirit of revolt that disturbed her grandmother so much rose within her. "I have never obeyed in my life !"

She sprang on to the higher rock. Splash, splash, one foot was in the water, the rail cracked and gave way ; in a moment she would have been swept down by the rushing torrent ; but she was lifted up and held in a firm grasp, from which she was powerless to free herself. Surprise deprived her of speech ; some one had conquered her ; what a queer sensation it was.

"Put your arms round my neck ; hold tight ; I want my right hand !"

Silently she obeyed ; strong as he was, it was a difficult task ; he felt his way slowly, steadying himself against the force of the water by grasping the bare branches of a fir trunk that had lodged on the rocks when on its voyage to the valley after some previous storm. The girl caught her breath, she felt no fear, but she was subdued.

He set her down on the further bank ; then he bent and said quietly, the mocking light coming into his eyes that had so annoyed her before :

"You behaved well and bravely, the passage was not without danger. Even princesses, you see, must obey sometimes."

She grew crimson and stood dumb and humiliated. He bowed and without another word sprang over the stream again and disap-

peared among the trees. Presently she descended the path and met Leopoldine who had just been carried over by two stalwart burschen; the gentlemen had disappeared.

Baroness Malden had recovered her equanimity now that they were nearing home, and "les messieurs" Müller and Meyer had been left behind; she began to revel on the romantic side of the adventure which was safely past.

"How did your Royal Highness get across?" she asked.

"Oh, somehow!" replied the other evasively. Presently she added, "Leo, they knew who we were all the time!"

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the baroness with the unnecessary warmth of expression usual to German ladies. "Who told you so?"

"Oh—he did—that—that *hateful* man!"

"What did he say?"

"He said—I don't know—I mean—I can't remember."

"Their jäger carried me over. Lorenz; come here, tell me who were the two gentlemen!"

Lorenz, like a useful piece of mechanism warranted to give information on any subject, stolidly replied that the gentlemen were Prince Conrad of Etlingen and his aide-de-camp Baron Max von Bodenhain.

"Prince Conrad of Etlingen is the man grandmamma means me to marry some day," cried the princess interrupting the baroness's shrill scream; then suddenly she blushed again painfully, until the tears rose to her eyes.

"His aide-de-camp Baron Bodenhain—his aide-de-camp," she repeated to herself.

That night when Princess Bice had dismissed her maid, she stepped from her window on to the wide balcony which ran round the house. The moon was brilliant, every shadow on the grim silent mountains was clear and black as the tropics, a broad silver pathway lay across the still dark waters of the lake. She stood for some time watching the scene, listening to the croak of the frogs and the familiar trill of the innumerable insects that rejoice in the quiet cool night. She was troubled; it was distinctly a new sensation to her this curious distrust of herself, this feeling of humiliation; she could scarcely account for it. Was she beginning to realise that the childish escapades she had been wont to delight in, in defiance of the wishes of her elders, were undignified, almost unladylike! Was it that for the first time in her life she had been conquered, and by a mere baron, the aide-de-camp of the man she was to marry one day! "*Even princesses must obey sometimes.*" She had been forced against her wish to do so, she had felt the power of a will stronger than her own.

She experienced suddenly an extreme distaste for the whole situation, for the marriage even that she had discussed more than once with indifference, declaring that she was thankful such things were purely a matter of arrangement amongst royal people; she

hoped fervently that she might never see Prince Conrad of Etlingen or his A.D.C. again until the inevitable time came when the former would be presented to her in all state at Grüningen as her future husband.

But the world does not move according to our whims and caprices. The very next day when the girls were riding through the woods they came suddenly upon the prince and Baron Bodenhain. They were standing in front of a chalet with their jäger; they had just come down from the heights; a dead chamois lay on the ground, a laughing peasant woman leaned over the balcony of the hut gazing at it, and several children were clustered shyly round. Another time the princess's love of sport and the excitement at the sight of the chamois would have made her, regardless of *les convenances*, jump from the pony and see all that was to be seen, but as it happened she grew rather pale and drew a long breath. Then in another moment she decided what line to take; she pulled up, and called to the young man, who with the rest had turned, taking off his hat to the ground in the foreign fashion.

"Prince Conrad," she said with a return of colour as he approached, "Prince Conrad," she repeated in a clear voice, she was bent on letting him realise that he was no longer incognito, "I must thank you for your kindness in helping us yesterday; it was very fortunate for us that we met you."

He had sprung forward when she beckoned to him; now he drew back quickly with a deprecating gesture and turned towards his friend as if to remind her that he had more right to receive her thanks. But she was determined to ignore the latter; she did not look in his direction; she cut short any further words by a few hurried questions as to their day's sport, and then gave her pony a sharp cut on the shoulder which made him dart forward into the wood. Leopoldine and the groom followed, and they were out of sight in a moment.

The prince looked at the baron and they smiled.

A few days later Prince Conrad and Baron Bodenhain walked over to Rosenhain without ceremony or formality to pay their respects to the ladies.

Countess Rodheim, in spite of her denial of the existence of sentiment in her composition, was pleasantly excited; perhaps the match-making propensities latent in every woman caused this. It seemed to her very interesting and desirable that her charge should meet the charming handsome prince in unconventional and romantic surroundings, and that the two young people should under her eyes "form an attachment" for each other as she expressed it; the word *love* she did not use.

When the gentlemen were announced she was resting, attired in an old blue cotton dressing-gown, her hair in papilottes, engrossed in

a novel of Bourget's, which for reasons of her own she preferred perusing in the privacy of her chamber.

It was astonishing with what alacrity she adorned herself; scarcely five minutes later she sailed into the garden, the most irreproachable of *dames d'honneur*, every curl in its place and every fold of her handsome silk gown bristling with dignity.

The girls were sitting beneath the tulip trees in their cool white dresses. As the two young men crossed the lawn the countess scanned them critically.

"Without doubt superbly handsome!" she said below her breath.

She was charmed with Prince Conrad's manners, they were soon talking like old friends. He devoted himself to the little princess and she chatted brightly, almost boisterously. Baroness Leopoldine thought this only natural; she cast her eyes up to the green roof above her as if she were about to breathe a prayer that Princess Bice's unholy theories might soon undergo a change for the better. As for Baron Bodenhain, the princess did not speak to him nor did he attempt to address her; he watched her a good deal, probably he was wondering what sort of wife she would make his friend and master. The two men were evidently fond of each other; indeed although the one was a reigning prince and the other a "mere baron," there was a cousinship between them. What a queer thing human nature is, or perhaps we should say girl-nature in this case; no sooner did the princess perceive that her frigidity to the baron passed apparently unnoticed by him, that he was enjoying the beauty of the scene and thinking very little if at all about her and her feelings, than she experienced a violent reaction which affected her behaviour strangely. She snubbed the prince, contradicted the countess, and when a sail in the boat was suggested, she first said that she would not and then that she would go, until the others looked at her with surprise.

The result of such a mood was that when they strolled up through the garden from the boat an hour later, she found herself alone with Baron Bodenhain. She had done it, she knew that, and consequently there came to her again a troubling sense of self-abasement which tied her tongue and made her feel foolish. He was not a talkative man, he was very silent; now he gazed dreamily across the lake at the cloud-encircled mountains whose topmost peaks arose from the mists clear and glorious, bathed in the gold and red of the sun's last rays. He remembered something about the beauty of nature and the happiness she brings to those who can understand her; such sentiments were usually ridiculed by this girl beside him, evidently he was not thinking of her, a fact that at another time would have irritated her sorely, but the spirit of the hour moved and softened her, as the evening light had touched to radiance the cold snowy summits. For a moment the dominant engrossing power of self was lost in the glimpse of the boundless sweetness and ineffable fulness

of something beyond its sordid limits; just as the alpine heights, glowing and beautiful, seemed a vision of the heaven which, say what they will, is the desired though maybe unacknowledged goal of all earth's travellers.

Had she after all been so entirely out of his thoughts? Perhaps not. As they stood among the roses whose rich perfume lay heavy on the evening air, he paused and turned to her suddenly; their eyes met and their thoughts; the same magic bound them. What was it? Poetry, magnetism, a lovely scene, or the power of one nature over another—that strange affinity that no scientist will ever be able to explain? Who can say! "Have you forgiven me?" he asked softly. And she caught her breath, bent her head, and with a quick sigh answered:

"Yes."

It is not to be supposed that Princess Bice did not suffer for what she termed her lamentable weakness. Late that night Baroness Malden opened her door softly and closed it again as softly; could it be possible that her royal mistress was crying! Leopoldine smiled mysteriously as one of the initiated. "Ah!" she exclaimed under her breath. She went to the window to listen for the strains of a nightingale wailing his woes to the moon, but the little brown bird does not frequent high latitudes, and it was cold; so she closed the casement with the reflection that the lake air (according to German ideas) made the hair fall off and the teeth fall out.

"Would Hermann love me still without teeth and hair?" she thought. And then she went to sleep and dreamed that Prince Conrad had taken up the profession of a dentist, and that Baron Bodenhein in Heinemann's livery insisted upon having the kitchen chimney swept. Perhaps it is good that the material hangs on to the coat tails of the ideal; Baroness Leopoldine was safe as a worshipper of the romantic; stern reality is free from affectation, and she did not realise that the other girl who daringly asserted her disbelief in romance of any kind possessed a far greater capacity for suffering.

After this the young people met constantly. The prince had a boat on the lake and he took the ladies for many a sail; he always came alone with his friend, enjoying the absence of all ceremony that the life in the mountains permitted.

The old countess congratulated herself upon her cleverness; she acted on her own responsibility, and did not let the grand duchess know of what was going on; perhaps she had a secret fear that the great lady might think it necessary to appear on the scene in person in order to superintend matters.

When people allow an "*idée fixe*" to settle itself in their minds, it is strange how blind they can be. Both of Princess Bice's companions only saw that she was happy and bright when with her future fiancé,

and that she was strangely changed and softened ; they remained in total ignorance of the real state of the case.

And so the days went by ; but at last the countess began to feel a little uneasy, the girl had grown so thin and pale, her eyes had the look which the Irish call "rubbed in with a smutty finger." The old lady could not understand the alteration in her ; this was not included in her notion of "an attachment ;" it looked far too serious ; and she began to think that perhaps after all the grand duchess's presence might have been a relief.

One day the princess came to her and said that she wished to go home, she was tired of the mountains.

"Tired of the mountains, königliche hoheit !" Countess Rodheim exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, I am tired, I want to go back," said the poor little princess. She went to the window and looked out. "I am not crying," she added defiantly, but her voice contradicted her words. The elder lady was extremely alarmed.

"My little sweet, darling princesschen !" she cried, "what is the matter ? What has happened !"

"Nothing has happened. I want to go, that is all. I want to go, Rodi."

And then of course, no sooner was it all settled, than she changed her mind, and did not wish to go. But as it happened a power stronger than hers arose and decided the question. Heinemann had grown very much bored with the country ; he longed for the gossip of the "Residenz," for his companions at court, who with himself pulled the strings there, or imagined they did. So curiously enough, when the princess had decided to return to Grüningen it became impossible for her plans to be altered. A hundred reasons of the most convincing description sprang up day by day to prove this.

One evening a royal travelling carriage drew up at the chief inn of the village of Mühlen ; its occupants had arranged to remain the night there on their way down to Grüningen.

This caused considerable excitement amongst the inhabitants, who collected at a respectful distance to catch a glimpse of the young princess whom they knew well and who was always so bright and cheerful. She bowed and nodded and smiled as usual.

"She looks ill," said a motherly peasant woman who held a fair-haired baby, and was occupied in vain endeavours to disengage its attention from an all-absorbing crust of bread, and to make it shake its small hand in greeting. "She is paler than when she went up. My Marie is just her age and twice her size. If only she could take some of the posset old mother Liesel brews from the herbs and flowers. Dear saints in heaven the Royal Highnesses have no chance."

Princess Bice entered the house and ascended the stairs to the large low room. In her honour a gaudy piece of new Brussels carpet

of a pronounced pattern had been placed on the white boarded floor, and a bright green tablecloth on the table, in the centre of which stood a stiff bunch of wild flowers in a Bohemian glass vase.

The ladies turned their attention to the delicious repast of coffee, rolls and butter, and the inevitable honey, which was very welcome after their long drive.

When they had finished, Baroness Malden, who had a headache, retired to rest, and the countess went into the village to ask about a crucifix she had ordered. The princess at her own request was left alone.

With a sigh of relief, she threw open the windows at the back of the house and leaned out, drinking in the fresh crisp air. A gushing mountain stream tumbled over the rocks below her turning a high slender wheel, and the sound of its noise and swirl was music to her ears. Above it came the tinkle of cowbells in the pastures beyond, and through the clear atmosphere rang the jodel of a shepherd on the heights which towered jagged and pine-covered until their summits were lost in the fast falling mists. A little sheep path wound almost perpendicularly up behind the mill, from which came the grating squeak of the saw and the resinous, health-giving smell of fresh pine wood.

How good it was to be alone, thought the girl as the breeze blew on her hot forehead, to be able unwatched to bid a last adieu to the beloved mountains and to something else which would for ever in her mind be associated with them, and which with them must be left behind. As she gazed, a tall figure appeared on the path above, descending with long swinging strides. She drew back, a quick exclamation escaped her, the colour rushed to her face. Had he recognised her? Perhaps, for his eyes sought the window, but she was hidden behind the clean Swiss muslin curtains.

The healthy glow called up by a long walk gave him a youthful almost boyish look. Why had he come? Had chance brought him or had an unconquerable impulse seized him to see her and speak to her again before that impassable gulf yawned between them, over which their eyes must meet no more?

As he disappeared she threw herself down by the window and pressed her hands over her eyes; she was a princess, but she was human. A longing possessed her to hear him say only once that he loved her. Why had she not been born a peasant girl and he a jäger, then the great world with its miserable distinctions would not have existed for them. After the day's work was over, hand in hand they would have sauntered across the meadows. Ah! the sweet jangling tones of a zither floated up from below; they maddened her, she started to her feet. There was a knock at the door.

She walked into the shadow and said, "Come in."

It was Countess Rodheim.

"Baron Bodenhein is downstairs, Royal Highness," she said

"He is passing through on a walking tour to join the prince at Reute, and hearing you were here, would like to pay his respects."

Princess Bice put her hand on the table; she was trembling.

"Does he bring a message from Prince Conrad?" she asked, but continued without waiting for a reply. "I am tired, I cannot see him, I must rest; let him tell you all he wants to say."

"But, dearest princesschen it might be better, the prince——" began the elder lady. The girl cut her short.

"Tell him anything you like!" she exclaimed impatiently. "That I am ill, that I am out of my mind, that I have gone to bed with high fever. My regrets, but the case is infectious. Quick, quick!"

The countess disappeared more rapidly than she had come. Undoubtedly at times the princess strongly resembled her grandmother. She did not see her after the door had closed.

The zither began again, twanging plaintively,

"Behüt di Gott mei lieb, es wär zu schön gewesen,
Behüt di Gott, es hätt nit sollen sein."*

Again the jodel sounded in the distance, an hour seemed to pass before there was a footstep on the stones and a small object flew in at the window and fell at her feet; she stooped and picked it up, it was a bunch of mountain flowers, Alpine roses, Männertreu and Edelweiss, the little pink rhododendron, her own especial flower, the sober, claret-coloured blossoms called man's faith and the white star of the Alps which the young men seek on perilous heights and offer their sweethearts as a token of their love.

He could not see her for she was behind the curtain again leaning against the shutter, her hands clenched, the flowers pressed to her lips, but her eyes followed the retreating figure until with a last backward glance it passed out of sight.

The old monotonous life at the palace soon began again and the weeks went by. The grand duchess was very kind at first; she thought her grand-daughter much improved, she was gentler, more amenable; but soon she almost longed for some of her perverseness back again, she could not account for her pale face and wistful looks. She questioned the countess narrowly, and that good lady, who was becoming a little uneasy in her mind, suggested that the air off the mountain lakes was often unhealthy and that the princess had insisted upon opening her window at night. She ventured to suggest that it might be advantageous if the marriage with Prince Conrad of Etlingen could be considered. Strange to say, she only mentioned most lightly the fact of having met the gentleman in question, thereby giving the grand duchess a wrong impression. She did not confess

* "God keep thee, love, it would have been too sweet,
God keep thee, it was not to be!"

even to herself that the uneasiness referred to had much to do with her reticence.

This uneasiness grew to gigantic dimensions when, a few weeks later, the announcement was made that Prince Conrad was expected on a visit, and things grew worse rather than better.

The court physician was called in, and the princess told him that she was quite well and only wanted to be left alone. He shook his head, and, gout being the fashion just then, suggested that she had inherited it from her grandfather. She had inherited something else from her grandfather, the stubborn old grand duke, and that was a very considerable pride which forbade her to inquire who was expected in the prince's suite. Surely, surely, he would keep away. And yet he was Prince Conrad's best friend and might be forced to accompany him. The thought burnt in her brain through the occupations of the day and the weary hours of the night, and her fingers clasped a little hidden bunch of withered flowers. The thought of the marriage filled her with despair and horror. At times a wild hope came that the prince might change his mind. This was only a preliminary visit, not supposed to be in any way connected with the grand duchess's matrimonial plans. She had never been able quite to understand him; he was bright, amusing, superficial apparently. Perhaps her thoughts had been too much occupied in another direction; now for the first time she realised that she had not considered seriously whether he was in love with her or not; he had appeared anxious to remain always the same, never to diverge from the beaten track of pleasant commonplace.

She remembered that there had been a certain constraint in his manner, probably the shadow of the grand duchess had depressed him even at that distance, and he had thought it against all etiquette to anticipate matters. At any rate she felt she must meet him with dignified amiability; so much she owed to herself.

On the following morning Prince Conrad of Etlingen arrived. Towards evening, Princess Bice descended the private stair and entered the grand duchess's apartments. She wore a simple white crape dress, and round her neck a long string of big pearls, which hung down to her waist like a chain and was fastened by a single diamond. She was alone, for she had told Baroness Malden to meet her in the boudoir.

Hitherto she had scorned the existence of nerves, those minute yet aggressive little tissues which add so considerably to life's difficulties, but latterly the constant presence of a companion had often irritated her and jarred upon her.

She entered the long corridor that led to the great state drawing-room, and paused by the open window. Her face worked as she gazed out over the lawns to where the yellow evening light gleamed through the clipped yew hedges and fell aslant the flower-beds. That same dying sun was gilding the mountain tops at Rosenhain.

Below her were the giant fountains, so close that anything thrown from where she was standing would fall into their marble basin. Her fingers clasped a few withered blossoms; she had made a stern resolve, she was going to part with her treasure, the only love-token she had ever received. She would do her duty, she said to herself; she would meet her future husband, if such he must be, with a clear conscience.

As she raised her hand, a door opened near her; she turned; was she dreaming? Before her stood Baron Max Bodenhain himself. He wore the splendid green and magenta uniform of the Etlingen Uhlans; he did not seem surprised to see her; perhaps Leopoldine the romantic had had something to do with this; where was she all the time, and why so remiss as to keep her royal mistress waiting? The girl grew very white as she caught sight of him; he was struck by the change in her, the smile which had transformed him faded.

"Princess," he said, "have you been ill? what has happened?"

Now the colour swept across her face, she drew herself up, but could not meet his eyes.

"I am quite well, thank you," she answered stiffly, but with a break in her voice.

Suddenly, instinctively the reason of it flashed across his mind, he realised in a moment that the game he had played had been to her a cruel one. He watched the painful flush rise to her very temples.

"Bice!" he cried impulsively. "Bice!"

"Let me pass!" she said with a not altogether unsuccessful attempt at her former haughtiness; but as she spoke, those treacherous little flowers, even in their shrivelled state, so undoubtedly betraying their identity, fell to the ground. He stooped and picked them up. Again the well-known light gathered in the grey eyes; as the truth dawned upon him, they grew soft and black as night. He raised the dry fragments to his lips, her hands in another moment were in the strong firm grasp she remembered so well. This time she did not try to free them, she knew there was no escape. He drew her into the window behind the palms and feathery ferns.

"Bice!" he repeated, "I love you." He spoke in a low voice, hurriedly, eagerly. "Is that nothing to you? I have something to tell you, something for which I must implore your forgiveness. I waylaid you at Mühlen to confess everything; it began in a joke but became bitter earnest, and you—and you——"

His audacity took away her breath, swept her off her feet, the indomitable will to which she had bowed from the first conquered her now. Duty, stern resolve and the consciousness that he, Baron Max Bodenhain, was in the palace, almost within reach of the grand duchess, speaking such words to her, a royal princess, even now on her way to meet her future bridegroom, vanished beneath a power as old as the mountains themselves; yet to those who for the first time

eel its overwhelming strength, new as the earliest streak of silver dawn that touches their peaks.

There was a sound at the further end of the corridor, and a rustling of silk. Rapid steps came nearer; the princess drew herself away from him.

"Stay where you are," she said quickly.

"But you must hear me before you go. You must listen!"

"Hush!"

She moved quietly from the deep niche where they had been completely hidden, and came face to face with Baroness Malden, who looked heated and flurried.

"Royal Highness!" she exclaimed, her eyes glancing curiously at the other's face, "the grand duchess has inquired for you, the grand duke and Prince Conrad are in the white drawing-room. I ask a thousand pardons for my stupidity. I waited in the ante-room, I have been searching in vain, it was the fault of the lackey, he did not announce—— Ach, I am out of breath!"

"I will come," said Princess Bice. She spoke as one in a dream, but when she entered the drawing-room a few minutes later, she was calm and serious. One man looking at her wondered if this could indeed be the merry, unruly girl of whom he had heard so much.

The grand duchess and grand duke were standing talking to several gentlemen in brilliant uniforms, the princess saw them through a mist. Presently her uncle's voice called her to herself.

"Beatrice, allow me to present to you Prince Conrad of Etlingen."

She raised her eyes, prepared to make some remark in reference to having met the prince before, but paused, coloured and bit her lips; all the self-control in the world could not help her to disguise her astonishment. She saw gazing at her with a friendly pleasant smile an absolute stranger. A tall man of about forty, who bent and kissed her hand, murmuring a polite commonplace. When he had finished speaking, and before she had time to ask herself what it meant, the grand duke's equerry brought up three officers whom he duly presented.

"Graf Hohenberg, Colonel von Oldenstein, Baron Max von Bodenbain zu Gernitz."

Her heart began to beat, she knew she must meet him calmly; she bowed, then looked up. Before her in all the bravery of a uniform of the Etlingen Garderietter, his handsome laughing face composed to a most deferential and abnormal gravity, his heels clapped together in approved German style, stood Prince Conrad of the mountains.

Suddenly he appeared to be attempting to turn a somersault, the windows rocked as in an earthquake, the voices sank to a whisper, his words came from a long way off.

"I have much honour——"

Then a flash and jumble of blue, white and gold, a gleam of steel scabbards and shining spurs.

"Leopoldine! quick a chair, I—I am tired—I——"

"But, Royal Highness! Ach, you are pale as death. Gracious heavens!"

Princess Bice had fainted.

* * * *

The princess passed an restless night. The court physician did not call it gout this time; he said she was overdone, and that her nervous system was slightly deranged. He gave her a sleeping draught which was only partially successful, and consequently caused strange nightmares, in which the real and the sham prince and baron played a large part.

She rose early and sent for Baroness Malden—Countess Rodheim was absent at this critical time. She appeared attired in an exquisite and carefully arranged *deshabille*.

"Which is Prince Conrad?" asked the princess at once.

"Undoubtedly he with the dark hair to whom the grand duke was speaking," Leopoldine replied.

"And—and our Prince Conrad?"

"Ach, heavens! I feel as one in a dream; how can I tell your Royal Highness? He is Baron Bodenhain, it appears; could they have dared to play a trick? It is incredible."

"And—the—other?"

"The other! Gracious powers, I know not, I dared not ask, he was not with the rest, but he is here in the palace. He wears the uniform of the Uhlans, and is decorated. If Countess Rodi were but here!"

"Listen, Leo, I must see Prince Conrad—I mean Baron Bodenhain as they call him. I must speak to him!"

"But——"

"No buts, I must, I *must*. You can manage; tell him to be in the arbour at the end of the lime avenue at nine. It is simple enough; I take Petite for a run, you accompany me."

"Powers above, if the grand——"

"Quick, lose no time."

So the baroness departed reluctantly. An hour later she and the princess were to be seen walking rapidly towards the end of the garden in company with a minute Yorkshire terrier, who little knew what an important part he was unconsciously playing. The lime avenue was a long terrace bordered on one side by great trees and on the other open to an expanse of country, the outer fringe of Grüningen. It was not a beautiful view but peaceful and homelike, green meadows, white roads and cherry trees, red-roofed villages and distant hazy hills. All looked dewy and fresh in the morning sunlight.

At one end of the terrace stood a dome-shaped arbour of green

lattice work covered with the large-leaved pitcher plant, where the goddess Flora kept watch over two carved-stone seats.

In the shadow, his back towards them, stood a man. Princess Bice left Leopoldine to gaze at the landscape and approached him rapidly. He turned; it was Prince Conrad, the real Prince Conrad whom she had seen for the first time the previous evening.

She was speechless; nothing probably could have surprised her more.

He smiled, bowed and bent over her hand. At that moment something familiar in his face made her feel she had known him before.

"I fear you expected another," he said pleasantly, as if there were nothing very unusual in the situation.

"I—I—" she gasped, but could get no further; she felt bitterly humiliated to think that the prince, a stranger to her, should know that she had made an appointment to meet his aide-de-camp.

"It was Baron Max, I fancy, for whom the honour of this meeting was intended?" he continued in the same tone. She did not answer, she was tired, overwrought, unhappy; the tears welled up and two escaped; she tried hard to control the silent sobs that would come. He became serious at once.

"Princesschen," he said kindly, just as Countess Rodheim might have done when the grand duchess was not within hearing, "forgive me, I was wrong; I love to tease, it was irresistible; dry your tears; I know their cause. I will tell you the truth. I came here to intercede for a culprit who is deeply ashamed of himself and almost despairs of obtaining your forgiveness. I think he had better plead for himself."

He stepped aside and called, "Conrad, you are wanted."

Some one came over the grass, a shadow fell across the sunny gravel.

"Allow me to present to your Royal Highness," the prince continued with mock gravity, "my cousin Prince Conrad Ernest of Etlingen Schönau."

She looked up through her tears; before her pale and eager, the traces of hours of suspense and anxiety plainly written upon his face, stood the man she loved.

* * * * *

The grand duchess has not quite forgiven her grand-daughter for marrying a poor cadet of the house of Etlingen; indeed, she never would have given her consent had it not been for the intervention of Prince Conrad the elder, of all people in the world, backed by the grand-duke himself. Even her frequent visits to the beautiful castle of Schönau, where she sees a very pleasant picture of happy home-life, fail to reconcile her to the state of affairs, for another princess reigns at Etlingen proper.

She does not know quite as much about that six weeks' sojourn at Rosenhain as she thinks she does. Countess Rodheim has on

occasions a singularly evasive not to say misleading method of answering questions. Love in most shapes is a phase of emotion which the royal lady considers an extreme form of affectation, suitable only to the middle classes.

But the grand duchess's ideas on the subject are merely a source of amusement to Princess Bice and her husband, amusement mingled perhaps with some pity. The great world with its crowns and courts, its turmoil and ambitions is nothing to them, they possess an unfailing receipt for happiness, learnt one never-to-be-forgotten summer, in the fresh free air of God's mountains.

HESTER WHITE.

OLD LOVERS.

Heart of my heart, when the day was young,
Hope sang to life with a silver tongue;
Hope beckoned Love down a flowery way,
Where 'twas always morning and always May,
And two true lovers need never part—
Do you remember, heart of my heart?

Heart of my heart, when the noon was high,
Work showed the way we must travel by;
Duty spoke cold and stern in our ears,
Bidding us bear all the toil and tears,
Partings and losses, sorrow and smart—
Have you forgotten, heart of my heart?

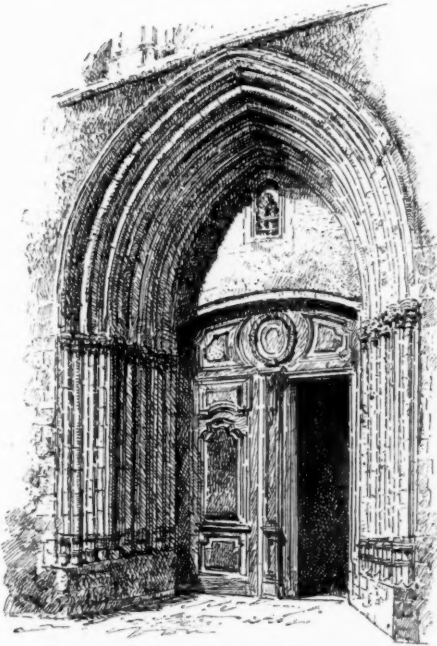
Heart of my heart, in the setting sun,
We sit at peace, with our day's work done;
In the cool of the evening we two look back
On the winding pathway, the noon's rough track,
And the morn's green pleasance, where roses twine,
Heart of my heart—with your hand in mine.

Heart of my heart, when the night is here,
Love will sing songs of life in our ear;
We shall sleep awhile 'neath the daisied grass,
Till we put on the glory and rise and pass
To walk where eternal splendours shine,
Heart of my heart—with your hand in mine.

E. NESBIT.

THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN LOTUS LAND,"
"MEMORIALS OF MRS. HENRY WOOD," ETC., ETC.



DOORWAY OF CHURCH IN VILLENEUVE.

THE storm and tempest of the Camargue, all the fury of the elements, the rolling thunder and the flashing lightning, passed away. We found the hotel reposing under blue skies, basking in sunshine, a delightful image of peace and plenty, harmony and comfort. It was the outside of the cup and the platter, the broad phylactery of the Pharisee.

Madame was taking an air bath at her door, and made us a deep reverence. Madame was punctiliously polite. How could you find fault with any one who invariably behaved as a queen and treated you as a favoured courtier?

Even in her bureau, she sat as a monarch upon her throne, and made out her bills as one dispensing blessings upon her clientèle.

"Eh, bien, messieurs," she said, as we returned her curtsey with elaborate bows. "Eh, bien, messieurs, what think you of the Camargue?"

"Madame, it is a remarkable spot."

"Well worth a visit, n'est-ce-pas, monsieur? Your morning has not been lost?"

"On the contrary, madame, we have had some delightful experiences."

"And Les Saintes Maries—is it not quaint and primitive? Did

the people throw stones at you? It is so amusing. One gentleman staying here came back with a black eye. He was quite charmed at what he called their playfulness and originality."

"Madame, we had no stone-throwing or imprecations. The people seemed more inclined for a game at hide-and-seek. As you say, they are playful and original."

"And the church, and the curé—you saw the curé? He invited you to déjeuner, probably; told you all about the pilgrimages. You will surely stay for a pilgrimage, or return for one."

"Hardly that, madame. The description we heard was so vivid that we have already seen one—mentally. We also had a very intelligent fellow passenger, who told us about many things."

"Je parie that it was that meddling Henri Roger," returned madame, with the smallest suspicion of a frown. "He has a great deal to say upon every subject, and what he does not know, he invents. Pay no attention to him, messieurs; do not be guided by him. He would give even *ME* a bad name, if you listened long enough to him."

Madame drew herself up quite three inches, and almost lost her balance.

"You do him injustice, madame. He certainly said your commissariat department left something to be——"

"He is a frightful gossip," interrupted madame; "and it follows that he must be a terrible story-teller. That young man will gradually work his way into a leading position, and one of these days will turn the town upside down. Those who live will see it. But the flamingoes, messieurs, you saw them?"

"Numbers, madame. The sky was black with them."

Madame raised her eyebrows and looked puzzled. It was one thing for her to assert that they were there; another to hear they had been seen.

"And the wild horses, and the storks, and the elephants, madame," we continued—"whole droves of them."

"ELEPHANTS!" cried madame. "Did you say ELEPHANTS, monsieur? But I never heard of ELEPHANTS in the Camargue. Surely you are mistaken? You mean cows?"

"Madame, you must yourself visit the Camargue. And we promise that when you see the sky black with flamingoes, you will find a drove of elephants on the plains beneath them. Monsieur Henri Roger—since such is his name—even hinted that elephants were good eating, and might with advantage be added to madame's commissariat——"

"Qu'est-ce que c'est?—à l'instant," cried madame to another inaudible voice from an invisible personage. And with a "Pardon, messieurs," she marched superbly down the passage and disappeared into regions impenetrable to folk who had not the entrée to her court.

She would have beguiled us into a longer stay and more excursions; but as H. C. said, human nature had its limits of forbearance. He was commencing to feel every symptom of what the ancients called the wasting disease, the moderns, decline. The owner of the tart shop was beginning to dream of retiring upon a fortune; but H. C. declared that tarts were worse than nothing: there was no nourishment in pastry; it did not build up the system like roast beef.

It was useless quoting Lady Maria; we could only protest feebly, for, secretly, we rather agreed with him. Had we been in St. Rémy, we might have made an arrangement to board with Mademoiselle Charlotte; but we were not there, and in Arles there was no such large-hearted philanthropist. So we decided that our stay in Arles must come to an end. And we really now knew the place by heart, with all its treasures and attractions.

"We must go," said H. C. pathetically, emphatically. "If we stay here any longer I shall become a candidate for my own museum. 'A nineteenth-century poet: fossilised by starvation.' How would it read? Or you might label me: 'A mummy discovered in the town of Arles. Genuine Egyptian antiquity, 2000 years before Cleopatra!' It would enormously attract no doubt. Still, as I cling to life a little longer, we will bid Arles a long farewell."

Sensible advice, and the next morning we packed up, took an impressive congé of madame—so glad were we to get away—and departed for Avignon.

Yet in Arles we left much behind that we had learned to love: including the contents of the museum, which H. C. had not yet succeeded in purchasing by fair means or foul.

"But I have laid the foundation," he said, "and shall get it in time. My offer will gradually filter into the brains of the town powers. I give my proposal a year to make its way; then I shall return and close with them. Our fame is made—mere fortune may come or not as it pleases. I despise filthy lucre."

Our fellow traveller to the Carmargue, Henri Roger, had been as good as his word, and on our last night, after our Barmecide feast had digested, he had called and gone with us round the town, showing us various wonderful old works that we could never have found unescorted.

As we stood long gazing at the west front of St. Trophimus, we heard a jingling of metal, and turning, saw that he had drawn two large keys out of his pocket.

"The keys of the cloisters," he said, in answer to our look. "I thought you would like to visit them by moonlight."

"But how did you get them?"

He laughed. "I should like to see the keeper, or any one else, denying me anything I had set my mind on," he said. "I don't know how or why it is, but men twice my age, and with five times

my power, give in to me. I suppose it is force of character, or a determined will, or mesmeric action. I don't know; but whatever it is, my mother had the same influence before me. Perhaps it is some Norwegian power that hasn't come down to these southern races."

We went up the narrow turning until we came to the ecclesiastical nook and the cloister entrance.

"Is it not a fine old doorway," cried our companion. "I delight in all these nooks and corners of Arles, all the splendid antiquities and Roman remains. Many an hour on moonlight nights do I spend wandering about from one splendid monument to another; and wandering alone—for I can get no one to share my enthusiasm."

Then applying his open sesame to the lock, the heavy door rolled back on its hinges and we passed into the magic precincts. Henri Roger rolled to the door, which closed with a noise that reverberated through the arched passages like thunder. We were prisoners. Out came the blind old custodian, shuffling down in consternation, more agitated than a molested owl.

"Who invades these sacred precincts at this hour of the night?" cried the startled man. "With what power or by what authority is anyone here?"

"Peace, peace, good François," said our companion. "Calm your fears. We are friends, not foes."

"Ah, c'est vous, Monsieur Roger!" cried the relieved guardian. "Idiot that I must be not to have guessed it! Who but you could gain entrance here, and play me such a turn? For a moment I thought of burglars and destroyers, and am all of a tremble."

"Good François, take this as a return for your fright," we said, offering him a piece of silver. "And drink to our health, including M. Roger, whether you choose coffee or cognac." †

"And, good François, leave us in peace," added Henri Roger. "We would be alone at this witching hour in these ghostly precincts. Shuffle back to the bosom of your family, and be at ease. When we depart, we will safely lock up."

"Bien sur, Monsieur Roger?" in nervous accents.

"You know me," returned Roger. "I need say no more."

And the poor, blind, pitiful custodian, murmuring, "Allons, donc! Bien le bonsoir, messieurs," shuffled round two sides of the cloisters, entered his abode, and locked his door for the night.

For half an hour we paced those moonlit cloisters, revelling in the atmosphere of bygone centuries. Henri Roger opened his heart to us; told all his plans and thoughts for the future, all his hopes and ambitions. There was something singularly attractive about him. He was frank and ingenuous to a degree, full of life and animation; handsome withal, with a noble, upright expression; the large, truthful blue eyes of the Norwegian; a brow full of thought and sincerity. He seemed to have studied a multitude of subjects, and was enthusiastic upon all.

"At this rate," we said, "you will some day make a noise in the world : will leave Arles, and carve out a great future for yourself. Paris will probably be your scene of action."



CLOISTER DOORWAY.

"I admit that I have dreams," he laughed ; "but to accomplish them will be difficult. I have no friends in the great world to push me on, and no money to speak of to make up for want of interest."

"Energy will overcome all obstacles," we returned ; "and one day

when you are President of the Republic, we will come and stay with you and remind you of this hour and prophecy."

"Hush!" he whispered. "Tell it not, but I would far rather be King—or see a true King reigning. I don't believe in a Republic."

"And you a Norwegian!" we cried.

"It seems strange, doesn't it," he said, half distressed. "Treacherous towards my country and people, who are all democrats. But I am not a democrat. Democracy is the curse of the world, and is at the bottom of most of its evil. It is my fixed conviction. I shall never change. All the same," he laughed, "if they wish to make me President of the Republic by-and-by, when I am grey and wise, and have a knowledge of men and know how to rule them, why, I would accept the responsibility for the sake of the good I might do."

Our shadows mingled with the shadows of the pillars thrown on the pavement, as we walked to and fro in the moonlight. Silence reigned. Not a sound, within or without, disturbed the air, save the echoes of our light footsteps. It was as Henri Roger had said, a ghostly experience. The shades of monks, dead and gone centuries ago, seemed to lurk in the dark corners. We stood and listened and almost fancied we heard the rustle of cloak and cowl and the echo of sandalled feet. And all the time the moon rose higher in the sky pursuing her noiseless way and flooding the world with mysterious light.

The church bell or some other bell rang out the hour. We started to find it already so late. With a long last look round, we turned to leave.

"Roger," we said, before the vision faded, "remember this night and our conversation. If anything is ever needed to spur on your efforts and ambition, think upon our prophecy. Some day you will be great."

He grasped our hand. "I must have known you a dozen years," he said, "not a dozen hours. You have entered into my life, and I shall never again be able to separate you from it. Cruel to have met if only to part so soon."

The great door rolled open; we passed out, and it closed upon us. Roger, true to his word, double-turned the lock and pocketed the keys.

We went round to the theatre, all its pillars and fragments standing out in the brilliant moonlight. Still more impressive was the Amphitheatre, and Roger, who seemed to possess a magic key that fitted all doors, or a secret charm that opened them, led the way up to the tower. Here we looked down upon a sleeping world bathed in moonlight. We imagined the plains beyond, the far-off sea. Not a sound disturbed the silence: silent the stars above us and the sailing moon.

Then, as the needle to the pole, we found our way down and passed through the lights and shadows of the narrow streets to the

banks of the flowing river—the matchless Rhone. It was our last impression of Arles.

"Here I always wind up my night's walk," said Henri Roger. "To me there is no attraction about the Rhone I cannot describe. As I watch the water flowing past in its mighty strength, I gain fresh energy and courage. Thoughts take form and shape, plans seem to ripen, ambitions become possible. Many and many a time I have leant over this parapet, and watched the water by the hour together, lost in dreams. The bells have tolled midnight, and one and two, and I have often gone off only when light was breaking in the east. Luckily I can do with very little sleep, or with no sleep. Now, whenever I come here, I shall think of to-night."

He went back with us to the hotel through the silent streets. Every café was closed; at the inn there was nothing but a sleepy porter to open to us. Madame had left her throne and departed taking her keys with her. They were reposing under her pillow. We could not "Drink hael!" could not take a "Cup of kindness," at parting.

"But you will see us off to-morrow—or rather this morning," we said. "And we will quaff a Stirrup Cup and wish each other God speed."

He promised, and with a handshake in which there was nothing French, went his way. Some hours later he turned up again: and we drained the stirrup cup to the dregs, and put it down light of wine but heavy with good wishes. Then he accompanied us to the station, and our last vision of the platform was blotted out by a waving hat that held all the good wishes of the stirrup cup; and a fair, frank face, full of life and hope, full of sincere expression, that seemed capable of faithful friendship, gifted with sterling worth.

The train went its way. Leaving Arles, in the distance we saw rising the ruins of Mont Major, and thought of the good Provençal who was to offer up prayers for the conversion of the heretic. Beyond were the heights of Les Baux, where Grim the owl was still languishing in captivity, little heeding that before many weeks were over he would travel over land and sea and find his destination in the Zoological Gardens of London. We could not see St. Rémy down in the plains, but imagination stepped in, and once more we were examining the work of the genius in gold thread, and were drinking the incomparable Vin de Provence in Mademoiselle Charlotte's dining-room, poured out by that lady with a generous hand and a delicate grace, and *tringuing* as a token of eternal friendship. The pleasant vision passed away as we reached Tarascon, where Martha had done battle with the dragon. Once more we crossed the Rhone and passed into the plains where once the Popes held sway.

It was impossible to approach ancient Avignon, so remarkable in history, so full of dramas and tragedies, of mighty secrets, jealousies, ambitions, plots and counterplots, without a certain emotion. Yet

nearer, there rose up above the ancient walls of the town the outlines of the vast palace of the Popes. Still above and beyond them, the tower and spire of the cathedral.

The train entered the modern station. Few passengers alighted and the omnibus was soon rattling up the broad boulevard in which there was nothing picturesque but the trees. Then turning into the narrow street it finally drew up in an old square at the *Hôtel de l'Europe*.

After the inn at Arles we were suddenly plunged into paradise. The hotel had existed for generations. It was one of those dignified, old-fashioned houses, where Royalty had been accustomed to descend, and round which a courtly atmosphere still clung. The rooms were large and lofty, some of them furnished with upholstery of the Empire period, others dating back to times more picturesque and in still better taste.

Madame Ville was the perfection of a good, generous, and amiable hostess. Here, we felt, would be no Barmecide banquets. The man-servant specially told off to wait upon our rooms was worth his weight in gold. Old and grey-headed, he had served in the hotel since the days of his youth, and moved with as little noise as a shadow, anticipating every want. In the mornings there was no rude awakening by a discharge of artillery at the door; but gradually one became pleasantly conscious that a shadow was flitting about the room, arranging everything with the art of an experienced valet, and then a gentle voice murmured: "*Monsieur, il est sept heures. Le bain de monsieur est préparé. L'eau chaude pour la barbe de monsieur est là. Il fait beau temps, un soleil ravissant—un véritable été de St. Martin. Au service de monsieur.*"

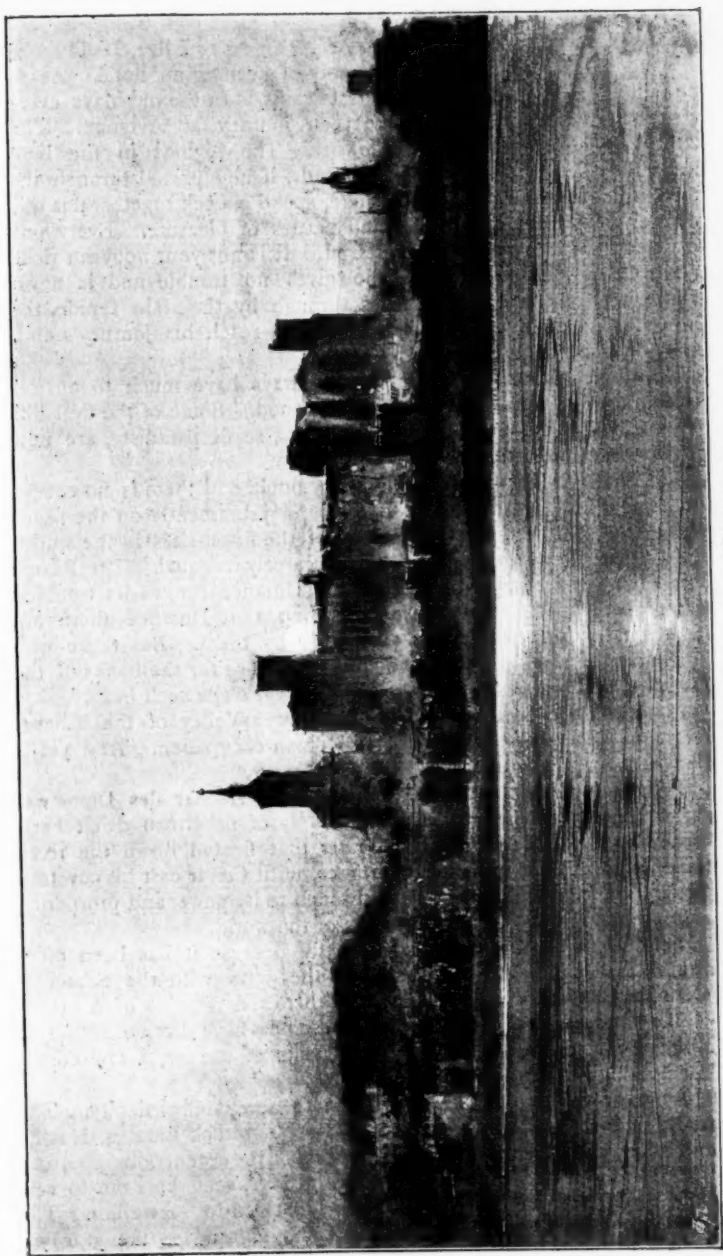
A slight conversation put forward as a delicate means of completely banishing sleep.

"He is indeed an admirable man," said madame, "and is my right hand. I cannot remember the place without him: and all my best clientèle insist upon having him to wait upon them when they visit me. But our great days are over," added madame with a sigh.

Certainly there was a slight feeling about the hotel of a past greater than the present. If the house thereby gained in dignity and repose, it probably painfully felt the change in a diminished ledger. There was no other evidence of change. Everything was perfectly appointed and a liberal hand ruled the dining-room.

"Why this alteration, madame?" we asked. "Your hotel is one of the most comfortable and best appointed in Europe. We have felt at home here from the first moment we entered your hospitable doors. All the world should flock to you. They would do so, if they knew how delightful you make a sojourn within your gates."

"As to the appointments of the hotel, monsieur," returned madame, "we have been accustomed to receive and entertain the first people in Europe. If my house had not been well appointed



PALACE OF THE POPES BY MOONLIGHT.

this could never have continued. And as long as I live, I will make no change. I recognise only one way of keeping an hotel. As to the falling off, it is due to these fast trains. In the old days every one going north or south broke their journey at Avignon. The hotel was always full to overflowing. The highest in the land descended here; all the crowned heads, if any passed through the town. People arranged to meet here, spend a week together; it was a series of picnics and drives and parties of pleasure. Every one was charmed, every one easily pleased. It is not your *nouveau riche* but your *ancienne noblesse* who gives no trouble and is never exacting. Now every one rushes through by the *train rapide*, the *train de luxe*. Every one is anxious to reach his journey's end. Avignon is neglected."

No doubt madame had reason. Railways have much to answer for, and they have not been an unmixed good. Some of the best bits of earth, out-of-the-way nooks and corners, small paradises, are now unvisited and forgotten.

But Avignon is not an out-of-the-way nook, and there is no excuse for its neglect. It stands out boldly and prominently on the pages of history. Nature has given it one of the finest sites in the world, and the view from the upper walks has scarcely its equal. The Rhone here is magnificent. Not far off, the Durance throws its troubled waters into the larger stream; and up the Durance there are delightful excursions, though few profit by them. But those who live amidst them, have a strange and strong love for the banks of the Durance, and will tell you that no other river owns such beauty.

Unlike many other towns in the Lower Valley of the Rhone, Avignon has preserved few signs of Roman occupation. And yet it was great long before the days of the Romans.

It goes back to the Stone Age, when the *Rocher des Doms* was surrounded by water, and a small colony of fishermen dwelt here, chiefly to capture the well-laden rafts that floated down the river. Gradually the place grew in importance, until Cæsar cast his covetous grasp upon it. The Romans added much to its power and prosperity, and it became one of the great cities of the world.

Yet few Roman remains exist, partly because it has been often attacked and pillaged, especially in the wars with the Saracens. Here may be seen a Roman arcade, there the remains of a hippodrome; here and there Roman foundations have been discovered, Roman pavements and mosaics, fragments of statues, a few coins; but nothing more.

Avignon was one of the first towns to accept Christianity. The tradition is that after the Ascension, the Jews took Lazarus, Martha and Mary, their servant Marcella, and one of the seventy disciples, and putting them into a boat without oars or sails, sent them out to sea. This richly-laden bark was miraculously guided to Marseilles. The whole province immediately became Christian, and in the year 70,



PONT ST. BÉNÉZET.

a son of Simon the Cyrenean, who had worked with St. Paul, became Bishop of Avignon. This first bishop was St. Rufus. Darkness following light, he suffered martyrdom.

Little is known of the succeeding ages until Constantine re-established the churches, and placed the long-persecuted clergy on a safe basis. He it was who reconstructed the cathedral of Notre-Dame-des-Doms, but of that edifice nothing remains but the porch. The greater part of the present building dates from the twelfth century.

Avignon was to have no peace. Religious persecution ceased only to give place to secular disturbances. She became a prey to the barbarous tribes. The Goths and Vandals devastated her. The petty kings who divided Gaul amongst them, came down upon her and made her pay their war expenses. She fell under the dominion of the Kings of Burgundy. The sons of Clotaire pillaged her; the Lombards made continual incursions. When the Saracens invaded her, Charles Martel came to her relief, but too late; the Mussulman was in possession. So the town was besieged and the siege went on for a year, when the town yielded, the Saracens were all massacred, and blood ran like water through the streets. One of them is still called the Rue Rouge from the circumstance.

Peace re-established, Avignon flourished once more. Later on she again fell under the dominion of Burgundy; then passed to the Counts of Provence and of Toulouse; and finally became a Republic, which lasted from 1135 to 1251.

It was during this short republic that the wonderful bridge was built, the Pont St. Bénézet, with its centre chapel overhanging the waters. Tradition assigns the building of the bridge to a miracle, through the medium of St. Bénézet, a young shepherd watching his flocks. In due time the bridge with its nineteen arches was finished; one of the finest specimens of the architecture of the period. The chapel was dedicated to St. Nicholas, and here St. Bénézet's remains were interred, in 1184: and here they remained until 1672, when they were transferred to the Monastery of the Célestins.

The bridge is now a ruin. Only four arches remain, but one of these bears the chapel.

Louis XIV. was said to have destroyed the bridge, yet did not do so. It was attacked at various periods, but never by Louis XIV. In its fragmentary state it forms one of Avignon's most interesting relics.

In 1309 began the reign of the popes in Avignon. Philippe le Bel had quarrelled with Pope Boniface VIII. And the latter threatened to become a serious thorn in the French king's side. Then Philip boldly conceived the idea of taking the papacy into his own hands. His wish was to have a French pope, living in France. Casting about in his mind he bethought him of his greatest enemy, Bertrand de Grotte, Archbishop of Bordeaux. Meeting him one day in a forest: "Archbishop," said the king, "I can make you pope if I choose, upon your promising to accord me six favours."

Upon which the archbishop fell on his knees and cried: "Monseigneur, I now see that you love me more than any other living man, and would return good for evil. Command, and I will obey you."

So the archbishop was elected pope, under the name of Clement V. and in 1309 took up his abode in Avignon.

In the time of the popes Avignon was said to be the gayest and most lively town in Europe. The very air sparkled with animation, it was nothing but a succession of fêtes, one gala day following another. Processions, pilgrimages, streets decorated with flowers and flags—such was the ordinary life.

The Rhone was a river of gorgeous pageants. Cardinals in scarlet robes were frequently seen arriving in their picturesque galères. Everywhere in the town the papal soldiers were visible. From many a house came the sound of lace-making, the spinning of gold thread for chasubles, the tap-tap of the small hammers of those who made baretas. In the air was ever a clashing of bells mingling with the sound of drum and fife. The people danced for very joy; danced day and night on the famous bridge, whilst the fresh air blew about them and the rapid river flowed beneath. It claimed no victims; the people were happy and danced on for ever. Life was too short for them, not too long or too sad.

Such was Avignon, says tradition, in the days of its popes. But if the people were happy, without thought for the morrow, it was not quite so with the sovereign pontiffs who ruled over them.

The successors of Clement V. learned wisdom by experience. What the King of France had once done, he might do again. Having established the papal throne in Avignon for his pleasure, he might for the same reason bring their reign to an end.

The popes preferred Avignon to Rome, which was in a dangerous and unsettled state between the Guelphs and the Ghibelins, and other internal warfares, and had no wish to go back to be made the shuttlecock of contending parties. It behoved them to build walls and raise fortifications, and erect them a palace that should be a wonder of the world and a stronghold against the enemy, if enemy came. Clement V. had been content to inhabit the Monastery of the Dominicans: a body of select preachers specially chosen by the church, whereby she showed her wisdom. He had dispensed with any great pomp and ceremony in the matter of abode.

But his successors were of another mind, and at different periods raised that marvellous structure whose vastness may still be measured, though much of its pomp, all its glory, has departed.

No better site could exist for a palace. On the left bank of the Rhone rose this almost impregnable rock, and here they would build their palace with walls of amazing thickness. Town-walls with gates and towers should still further protect them.

All was done, and much of it remains to this day. The famous

city of the popes still bears witness to that mighty fourteenth-century sway. Every pope in his turn altered and added to the work of his predecessor. John XXII began it. Benedict XII. undid all John's work and really laid the foundation of the vast palace that more than anything else bears witness to the wealth and power of the papacy. Clement VI., Innocent VI., Urban V. all added to the wonderful world around them. Each prided himself upon building his own palace, and not living in that of his predecessor. In the end four palaces reared their heads under one roof, a magnificent mediæval monument.

Then came Gregory XI., who did nothing. In Avignon the reign of the popes was over: and in 1377 he went back to Rome. The four popes who built the chief part of the palace were all French. It was, said Froissart, the most beautiful and the strongest house in the world. In the seventeenth century it went through much mutilation, and in 1812 was turned into barracks.

The reign of the popes in Avignon has been called the second Babylonish captivity by Petrarch, but it was certainly a very willing and brilliant condition of things. A time, too, of great activity and effort, of stores of mental and physical energy.

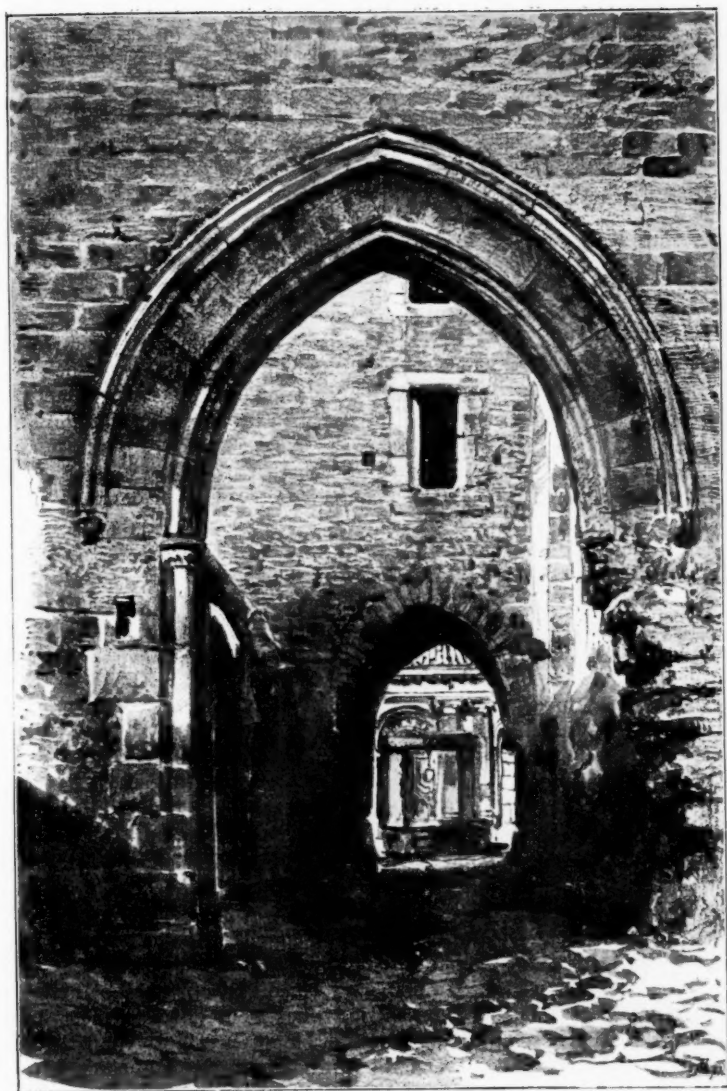
It was evidently thought Avignon would be the Papal seat for ever. The court became notorious for its luxury and dissipation. Pleasure and self-gratification ruled the hour.

Amongst the illustrious came Petrarch; and here his friend Cola Rienzi, the once famous and formidable Tribune of Rome was imprisoned. His dungeon was in the Tour de Trouillas, where he languished for five years. Otherwise he was not badly treated. Good food was supplied him, and books for reading and study. But to the proud chief of the Capitol, at whose word men had once trembled, this loss of freedom must have been as galling as that later captivity to Napoleon in St. Helena. His life was spared and his imprisonment finally brought to an end through the influence of Petrarch. They were close friends, and travelled long together.

The earnestness of Rienzi's character did not forsake him in his downfall. He still pursued the serious reading that had been his favourite pastime in the days of his power. The study of the Bible, the history of the ancient Romans, the books of Livy—these were ever in his hands.

That fourteenth century was full of remarkable episodes and events for Avignon. The popes, ruling the world, would not let the grass grow in the streets of the papal city. Matters of great moment, both religious and political were decided within the palace walls. Secret consistories were ever taking place—and who or what can be more secret than Rome? If walls tell tales, surely the Vatican is the exception that proves the rule.

The popes of Avignon asserted their right to universal domination. John XXII., first of the alien popes waged fierce war against Louis de



RUINS OF MONASTERY, VILLENEUVE.

Bavière, Emperor of Germany. Nicholas V., antipope at Rome crowned Louis, defying John. We have seen how the latter could be a bitter enemy. He captured Nicholas, brought him to Avignon, placed a rope round his neck, publicly pardoned him, and then threw him into prison until his death.

Benedict XII. carried on the quarrel with Louis. Clement VI. excommunicated him. He died, and his successor, Charles IV. of Austria, was as devoted to papal supremacy, as Louis had been opposed to it.

Then came Joanna of Naples, Queen of the two Sicilies and Countess of Provence, therefore owner of Avignon.

This august lady at the age of twenty caused her husband, Andrew of Hungary to be assassinated, in order that she might marry Louis of Tarente: a lady almost worthy of being a Borgia. To the pope at Avignon came Joan, demanding the necessary dispensations.

She was ravishingly beautiful, and arrived with great pomp and ceremony up the broad waters of the Rhone. Eight cardinals in their scarlet robes went to meet her. Though only twenty years of age her beauty and marvellous intellect had brought the attention of the whole world upon her. Joan was received by the cardinals under a dais of cloth of gold worked with jewels that flashed in the sunlight. More resplendent still, it was remarked, was the dazzling beauty of this fair woman.

In this manner, she was escorted through the streets. Some of the crowd everywhere assembled fell on their knees before the vision, and others looked on in awestruck silence.

Many a pulse beat faster as a glance from those wonderful eyes pierced the chain armour of his heart: and who shall assert that Clement VI. escaped the charm: for though pope, he was still human. At any rate, he accorded her all the favours she demanded; and as a return, she made him a present of the town of Avignon. It was pretended that she received eighty-thousand florins for the town, but the money was never paid.

Not a word was said about the assassination, and this fourteenth-century Mary Stuart was free to marry Louis of Tarente.

Louis of Hungary, however, brother of the murdered Andrew, determined to avenge the crime. He came down upon the kingdom of Naples, seized it, and exacted that the Queen should be brought up for judgment. The pope was compelled to act, and very unwillingly summoned Joanna before the papal tribunal.

Again she arrived with pomp and ceremony up the broad river. Again eight cardinals in their scarlet robes went down to meet her with the dais of cloth of gold and flashing jewels; and again she made a royal progress through the town, captivating all hearts. No fear showed she; no pallor of the cheek or faltering glance. Had she been condemned the town would have risen in revolt to save her. Executed, the pope himself might have trembled for his life.

She was her own defender; pronounced a learned discourse in purest Latin; and her logic was so subtle, her arguments were so unanswerable, that her judges rose up in a body and pronounced her innocent. The verdict was carried beyond the walls, and the town rang with enthusiastic acclamations a hundred times repeated; brilliant fêtes were organised for many days; Joan departed in triumph, and Louis of Hungary made up his mind that he would never again go to war with a beautiful woman. For if a woman is both beautiful and unscrupulous, she will get the better even of his Holiness.

During the whole reign of the popes in Avignon, the Romans endeavoured to get them back to the Capitol. With a great part of the people the Babylonish captivity found no favour. They wanted their popes back in the Vatican: were continually sending an embassy to Avignon, pleading for a return.

Petrarch and Rienzi arrived together: two notable envoys. Clement VI. received them with all honour: reduced the recurring period of the popes' jubilee from a century to fifty years, thereby immensely enriching Rome: but declined to leave Avignon.

Petrarch and Rienzi were little satisfied with the result of their mission. Rienzi determined to make Rome independent of the papal power, and by his own strength alone, this famous Tribune, son of a poor innkeeper, brought about the Republic. Intoxicated with success, detested for his pride, attacked by the nobles he had so humiliated, abandoned by the people, ever the greatest of turncoats, deserted on all sides, he fled to Prague.

Charles IV. of Austria, the pope's great friend and ally, immediately delivered him into the hands of Clement. He entered Avignon with a certain amount of pomp, surrounded by archers: and no figure was more erect and fearless, no step was prouder, no eye glanced out more boldly than that of the fallen Tribune.

Death would have been the end of it, but for the prayers of Petrarch and the death of Clement VI. In the cell of the tower one may still see the marks of the chain in the vaulting, where, it is said, Rienzi passed his five years of captivity.

Then Innocent VI. reflecting that though he had attacked the temporal power of the popes, he had never waged war against their spiritual supremacy, sent him to Rome under Cardinal Albornoz, with the title of Roman Senator, there to put down fresh rebellions. But Rienzi again lost his discretion; made fresh enemies; and in a riot was killed by a follower of the Colonnas. Thus died one of the greatest men of his time.

Another act favourable to France the popes were able to accomplish.

Towards the end of 1350, Jean le Bon, King of France grew angry and dissatisfied with Humbert the Irresolute, who had ceded to him the rich Province of the Dauphiné; then, repenting, wished to take it back again.

John appealed to Pope Clement. The latter espoused his cause; invited Humbert to his court; represented the fleeting nature of all earthly possessions; dilated upon the joys of a religious life; and persuaded him to take orders: first as a bishop, next as Patriarch of Alexandria; and the Dauphiné, loveliest of provinces, became irrevocably united to France: a very pearl in its crown.

Thus Avignon in the fourteenth century enclosed within its walls all the elements of a powerful and mighty kingdom. Princes and crowned heads went to and fro in homage to the papal throne. The cardinals, of whom most were French, did not neglect their own affairs. They too lived in great pomp, and built themselves strong castles with battlemented towers. The place was overrun with every species of religious order, and monks were said to be as plentiful as soldiers: a strange medley of conflicting elements.

Streets were ever full of life and movement. The inhabitants alone numbered 80,000. Convents and monasteries sprang up in every direction; churches without number. Three hundred church bells were for ever more or less ringing. The air was full of sound; and Avignon was called *l'Isle Sonnante*—a word difficult to translate satisfactorily.

All this formed the bright side of Avignon. Peace and prosperity reigned. She had all that heart could desire; far too much, it may be, in the way of luxury and self-indulgence. No man's hand was against her.

But there were, nevertheless, occasional visitations beyond her control. The Rhone and the Durance would overflow their banks and spread devastation far and wide; famines arose, and there was no Egypt and no Joseph to supply them with corn. Several times the plague decimated the country, on one occasion, it is recorded, claiming 100,000 victims.

Against this they could do nothing. They could not fight with shadows; could not stay the famine, or the rising waters, or the black plague. But so lighthearted were they that the evil once past, they quickly returned to their songs and laughter and *sans-souci*. The mercury of their temperament would rise to fair weather at the smallest parting of the clouds.

“Sur le pont d'Avignon
Tout le monde y passe.”

So rang the rhyme. And spring and summer, autumn and winter, they danced the hours away.

But the popes possessed more than Avignon.

On the right bank of the Rhone was the picturesque and flourishing town of Villeneuve. High up on the rock was the splendid and impregnable Fort St. André with its castellated walls and magnificent gateway.

The town has become a dead city, sad and desolate, but most interesting to visit.

The church still exists, with its fine doorway and remarkable cloisters. It dates from the fourteenth century and was built by the nephew of the first pope, John XXII. In the cloisters there



RUINS OF MONASTERY.

reigned a semi-darkness, throwing over them an air of mystery. Men at work seemed to have turned them into a carpenter's shop.

Not far off was the ruin of a Carthusian monastery that had once played a great part in life. It was of great extent, rich and powerful,

All ranks and conditions of men retired here from the world, and the popes treated them with favour and indulgence.

It is now nothing but a picturesque ruin, with crumbling walls and broken staircases, where weeds and creepers find a foothold. Here and there a nook has been turned into a small dwelling-house. In one of them lived a woman, who suddenly opened her window and asked if she could be of any use to us.

As it happened, we wanted her elevation for a photograph, and asked permission to enter. The staircase was round and ancient and dark. Her little room was no larger than a good-sized closet, and might almost have been a cell in days gone by. We looked round for the ghost of a monk: an old Chartreux in cowl and cloak, ready to take his place in the little cemetery hard by: or a young novice still hesitating between the indulgence of the world and the ascetic life of the cloister: half doubting if the latter is as perfect an existence as he had thought it.

But there lurked no suspicion of a ghost in any one of the corners. The atmosphere of the room, with its rush-bottomed chairs and ugly little pictures in black frames decorating the walls, was too hopelessly modern and commonplace to admit of ghostly shades.

Nothing ghostly was there about the rosy-faced, substantial owner.

In a corner stood the stove, on which a bubbling pot-au-feu sent up a savoury steam. From the open window we had a vision of Gothic arches and broken steps and crumbling walls; one of the loveliest of ruins.

"Monsieur is much taken with the view," said the woman. "It does not interest me. I think it triste. No life or movement. But it suits me to live here. I get my room for almost nothing, and the thick walls make it cool in summer and warm in winter. It was a great place in the days of the monks, and they and the Benedictines had it all their own way. I daresay they enjoyed themselves in their own fashion. On n'fait pas maigre tous les jours!"

The good woman looked as though she made no exception even of Friday.

On the other side the way, very near to the ruins, was the hospital, with its sunny court, where vines trailed over trellis work, and on the pavement one traced the shadows of the Sisters as they flitted to and fro in their black dresses and large white caps.

Attached to it was a museum, and some of its pictures were ancient and admirable, and some were poor. Here also was the fourteenth-century Gothic tomb of Pope Innocent VI.: a magnificent specimen of tabernacle work with delicately carved niches. For long this tomb was in the ruins of the Carthusian monastery, where it did humble duty as a general store cupboard to a poor worker in the vineyards. Pope Innocent himself had founded this Monastery du Val de Bénédiction, and his tomb was fast going to ruin amidst the larger ruin, when, a few years ago, it occurred to the town council

of Avignon that they might as well preserve so fine a monument of the Middle Ages.

Thus it happens that now the Sisters have it in their keeping, and what restoration was needed has been well done. They are proud of it, and show it with even more devotion than their pictures, declaring that it brings a blessing to their doors. The Sister who showed us over the place, was small and pathetic-looking, with a face as white as her cap, and eyes that looked out from the long tunnel of starched white linen with an expression that was sweet and gentle.

Villeneuve we have said looks like a dead and melancholy city. There is no life or movement about its streets; everything seems at a standstill. It was called the ante-room of the popes: and an underground passage brought palace and fort into secret communication with each other.

The situation of the fort is bold and commanding, overlooking the waters of the Rhone and the Durance; the vast plains stretching to the Mediterranean. Nothing could approach unobserved: and if an enemy arrived their reception was ready for them.

The climb up the rock was steep and toilsome, but the reward was great. The fort is of vast extent; a whole town of streets and fortifications. Within its walls was the Abbey of the Benedictines of St. André. The gateway with its massive, castellated drum-towers, looks as though it might outlive the ages. Once within, you are transported to feudal times, and look upon another world.

Suddenly amidst the deathlike silence that reigned, there appeared the black dress and figure of a nun, and we discovered that a convent still exists here. She had come to do the honours of the place. Took us to the small Romanesque Chapel which goes back to the twelfth century; opened doors and conveyed us through immense and wonderful rooms.

Most interesting of all was a small somewhat remote doorway, and the nun looked wonderfully picturesque as she bent down and applied the key to the lock, her black graceful dress standing out in strange and strong contrast with the ancient and splendid masonry. Then she threw open the door and we entered a dark circular chamber that was half cell. In tones that thrilled her hearers and echoed in the roof, she said:

"This is the room in which the Man with the Iron Mask was confined, before he was taken to another and more open part of the Fort."

So here had languished for a time in captivity, that mysterious being, very nearly the most interesting figure in the pages of history. We almost felt on sacred ground.

H. C. struck a match, and by its light we saw that we were in a small vaulted chamber. Its walls were probably twenty feet thick. No ray of light penetrated; it was the gloomiest of dungeons. We gazed around, hoping for some revelation of the secret that will never

be known. Nothing but blank walls met us. He had not even left a signature behind him. Then the match died out, and plunged us in darkness deeper than before.

We left the cell, and the nun locked the door. Our visit, as far as she was concerned was over. The room that had held the Man with the Iron Mask was her *pièce de résistance*; she had wisely kept it to the last. We thought of the anecdote recorded of him: the plate he is said to have thrown out of the window, on which he had written down his name and history: and we felt that to recover that plate and learn the mystery would have been worth a life's devotion.

Our guide departed, leaving us in possession of the ruins; looking very graceful as she passed lightly down the narrow thoroughfares; almost as a ghost out of the dead past. But her face was very human, full of expression, full of life in a quiet way. Here she lived out of the world, but had by no means lost her interest in all that went on around her.

"I need not tell you that I am not cloistered," she said, when we asked whether she ever crossed the river and went into Avignon. "I am a lay sister, and shall never be cloistered. Whenever I have a holiday I go off to my friends and spend some happy days with them. My father and mother, who are getting old now, live just behind the palace of the popes. I have brothers and sisters all living at home. They do not like my being here, and are always asking me to return: but though I love to be amongst them, I am always glad to return to the repose of the convent, and the gentle care of the nuns. Some day I may change my mind, and go back to the noisy streets and the friends, but I don't much think so. Here is a settled quiet home for life, with no uncertainty about it. In the world one never knows what is going to turn up next."

She was still quite young, this Sister; not more than twenty-five. There was a good deal of suppressed energy about her. Her face was almost beautiful; the features well carved, the chin firm and pronounced, the brown eyes large and full of expression. There must be some reason for her present retirement. Had she been crossed in love? Had some one proved faithless? Or had she set up an idol of gold in her heart to find it only clay?

We felt that something of this sort had happened. In time the sting would wear away; the wound heal; she would go back to the world; and wiser, and with romantic ideas toned down to human level, would give her heart and hand into better if more prosy keeping. The idylls of the heart, with few exceptions, exist only in dreams. "*Il y a toujours un qui aime, et un qui se laisse aimer.*" This world was not meant to be a paradise.

For a time we wandered about this dead world, which took us so far back in the ages. We seemed to have returned to the days when the popes held sway here, and influenced the course of empires. Woe to those who ignored them or set them at defiance. No nation



CELL OF MAN WITH THE IRON MASK.

bold enough to do so had yet arisen. King Harry of England was still in the far future. Bloody Mary, who for England happily made a return to Romanism impossible for all time (in spite of Cardinal Perraud and his prophecies) had not played her short but momentous tragedy; the Reformation was still undreamed of. A good deal of two centuries had still to roll away before the great Emancipation was to fall upon our island.

When the popes ruled in Avignon they were kings: temporal as well as spiritual: with an enormous amount of wealth for carrying out their most extravagant wishes, most despotic plans. From the top of the drum-tower, we looked out upon the vast area over which they ruled by right of possession.

The broad Rhone, flowed deep and far, a majestic stream full of power and repose. Once more in imagination we saw all the gorgeous pageantry passing upwards. Fair Joan of Naples arriving to defend herself, and to triumph; so reserving herself for a later and more cruel fate. The cardinals with their red robes, meeting her beneath the flashing daïs. The oft-recurring fêtes, when the river was crowded with galères and small boats, and at night lights and torches flashed to and fro upon its bosom; and sounds of revelry rose upon the air; and laughter and dancing and a merry crowd held the famous bridge in possession, and the bones of St. Bénézet turned in their coffin at the dissipation which never ceased, and the pampered luxury which knew no bounds and observed no laws.

Before us, rising above the river, stood the great walls of the town, throwing out their mediæval influence upon the nineteenth century atmosphere—an age of horrors, destructive to all that is beautiful, sacred and historical. Above the walls rose the outlines of that marvellous palace, vast as the ambitions of its sovereigns, firm and strong as their power, impregnable as their will. The outlines came out in strong relief against the blue sky, shining above them, serene and calm in its majesty; looking down compassionately upon Earth's tricks and turns and little brief authority.

Later we stood on the bridge, near the chapel that had once held the bones of St. Bénézet that had turned in their coffin.

It was the hour of repose. The garish daylight had departed. In the west a glow still lingered. The moon was rising behind the palace, throwing the walls into half-obscurity. The scene was full of romance and charm. Full of quiet majesty were the outlines of palace and towers and cathedral against that silvery moonshine.

Inconceivably beautiful was the evening light upon the river; the jewelled pathway thrown by the moon. It was full to overflowing; almost ripe for the inundations that in a few days overtook it, consternation following in the path of the waters. On they rushed beneath the arches of St. Bénézet, loud with a sound of warning; yet a sound of power and energy and life, that, as Henri Roger had said, invigorated the spirit, and braced up one's strength and

resolution. The silvery flashes danced and sparkled, and the rushing water seemed to hurry them away towards the far-off sea, where they decked the hair of the sirens, and lighted up their halls. And all the while the moon rose higher; a dead world; calm, cold, unsympathetic; yet full of a magic that will never die.

A perfect night, a matchless scene; one of the most beautiful scenes on earth; steeped in romance: the everliving influence shed abroad by nature in her earthly paradises; the undying romance of the Middle Ages; of great deeds and achievements; passages in history that revolutionised the world, and will live as long as time rolls on; of which, time only deepens and widens the interest and splendour, surrounding all with that weird mystery which belongs to the days of the past; shadows, in a sense, of another world.

When we went back to the hotel, the square was silent and deserted. The picturesque courtyard, sleeping in the moonlight, was beautiful with outlines of vines and creepers traced upon the pale pavement. A warmer light shone through the windows. Madame Ville was keeping vigil at her desk; perhaps balancing her ledger; perhaps deep in the pages of a last new novel.

"Ah, monsieur," she said, "I can tell that you have been enjoying the moonlight—it is reflected upon your face. I do not wonder. If you stand at the further end of the long bridge, and look upon the rushing waters of the Rhone, the outlines of walls and palace, all bathed in that wonderful light, I always say there is no scene like it on earth. Certainly I have not seen your Alhambras, your Bays of Naples, your Venetian gondolas gliding up and down the moonlit canals; these may be all very well; but for me, give me, beyond anything I ever did see, the Rhone and Avignon on such a night as this."

How different from Arles, our present quarters! The more we saw of Madame Ville and the Hotel de l'Europe, the more they won our heart. Had it been possible we would have remained here for weeks, exploring the matchless neighbourhood, always returning to the most home-like of inns, most hospitable and reasonable of hostesses.

To-night, late though it was, Pierre, our inimitable attendant, was in readiness to light us to our rooms; arranging everything for our comfort with the silence and ease of a perfect valet; and always retiring with the same words: "A votre service, monsieur." But now he added, with quite a fatherly intonation, an air of appropriation, not only excused but appreciated: "Bon soir, monsieur; dormez bien."

A wish fulfilled. All night we dreamed of moonlit rivers flowing to the sea; of sunlit streams, and gorgeous pageants; of fair Joannas making royal progresses and flashing love-lit glances; of vast palaces and imperious popes; and of blue serene skies that shed down their peace and repose upon a sleeping world.

EDITH GRANGE.

I.

A FLASH of gold and violet in the gaslight! Noel Felton's attention was caught and he stopped.

It was not a day for loitering; the November air was keen and damp; wreaths of fog rolled down the Strand and magnified Charing Cross station into the misty glory of some great palace. Every eave and windowsill dripped its contribution into the slush below. The streets of London were at their worst. The traffic slipped and struggled. All the misery of the great city poured past, wet, bedraggled, haggard and hopeless.

Yet the young man who had been walking his fastest, with soaked umbrella and long coat buttoned tightly from feet to chin suddenly stopped, caught by that mere flash of colour.

It was only a slender girl selling flowers, a girl of about seventeen with great sad grey eyes and masses of short golden hair falling to her shoulders. A large tray of violets glittering with the rain was strung round her neck. A little fur cap was perched jauntily on one side of her head like a half-drowned rat. Her dress was of plain dark blue serge, shabby but fitting her to perfection. She had no cloak to protect her, and stood shivering in the pitiless cold, a picture of beauty and misery.

When Noel Felton stopped, she pushed her violets out a little nearer to him and asked him to buy a bunch.

He never wore flowers, but he bought one and went on his way carrying it in his hand. Once or twice he looked at the wet blossoms with satisfaction. They were part of that momentary gleam of colour that had come to him through the mist and dampness. But when he reached the cheerful light of his own room, where the fire blazed brightly and the comfortable chairs gave him a more than human welcome, the violets only reminded him of the rain outside, and he flung them impatiently on the table.

Noel Felton was not one of the ordinary young men of London, who seem to be turned out chiefly in two patterns, the gilded butterfly and the plodding slave. Life to him was a serious battle, but a battle in which he rejoiced for he knew that he should conquer.

He had brilliant talents, too often the curse of youth, but had the good fortune to unite with them a force of character and a strength of purpose that is rarely found in so young a man. The pleasures and amusements of a great city were nothing to him. Not because he could not feel their delights, but because he knew that he must

trample them under his feet. The path to fame is strewn with the wrecks of all else that is sweet to us. From boyhood he had pursued the same unbending course. He gave no chance in the game of life; he held good cards, but he was not fool enough to play them carelessly.

And now, at the age of twenty-seven, he was secretary to a prime minister, and had more political power than thirty members of parliament. He was well known and even feared by more than one great man. The houses of statesmen and leaders of Society were opened to him without exception. He rarely refused an invitation; it was a matter of duty not pleasure. He wished to be the most powerfully befriended young man in London. One day, of course, he would marry, but as princes marry, to establish their thrones. If he loved, so much the better for him; if not, it would be unfortunate, but it could not be helped. Against any misplaced affection he felt absolutely secure. Though time alone could prove if his self-control was so strong as he deemed it, and if the relentless intellectual machinery of his life-purpose might not one day break down in the agonies of some great passion.

To-night he was tired, but there was work to be done, and he settled down to it steadily at his writing-table. Cigarette after cigarette was lit and burnt to ashes before the clock on the mantelpiece struck one, and he rose with a yawn. He mixed himself a brandy and soda, and lighting a cigar threw himself wearily into a large arm-chair before the fire.

Then the faint smell of violets came to him, and looking round he saw the bunch he had bought lying on the table by his side.

He took them up and began to idly wonder why he had bought them. It was an impulse, and he was not given to impulses; they were too often dangerous. Yet what a wonderful face the child had who sold them! Poor girl! with such a face, and a flower-seller in the streets of London; it was terrible to think of the end!

So he mused, gazing abstractedly into the fire, and in a few minutes he fell asleep.

And as he slept he was seized with a great agony and terror, and through darkness and storm he saw a faint golden patch of light gleaming like a misty star. He groped and stumbled towards it, mile after mile, and as it grew clearer, it took the likeness of the little flower-seller, and the gold of her hair glittered like the sun, and her face was like the face of an angel.

Then, as he drew closer, he saw that she was standing upon a high rock that rose from a sea of black slime, and that the sea was alive with strange reptiles and gnarled monsters and creeping things. The air around was filled with mocking voices and the swift rustle of unseen wings. Then from the sea that quivered with foul life there crept a monster at which all the others cowered and trembled, and slowly crawling up the rock it clutched her robe with its claws and

dragged her down into the slime. And all the other evil things rejoiced and came and rent her. And as the golden hair was disappearing in the sea, the face of the great monster was turned towards him for a moment, and the sleeper shrieked, "No, no; not that; I will save her!" for the face was his own. And so the monster became a godlike form, and lifted his victim from the sea, and bowed himself at her feet in tears.

Noel Felton woke with a start, and looked at the clock. He had not been asleep more than a minute, and his cigar was not even out. His face was covered with a cold sweat, but he jumped up and looking at himself in the glass, laughed.

"Too many cigarettes," he said to himself, and went to bed, flinging the bunch of violets half angrily into the fire.

Yet that dream was remembered by him to his dying day; for it was the beginning of pity, and the end of pity was sorrow and death.

II.

FOUR weeks passed by, and Noel was beginning to be uncomfortably conscious that the little flower-seller was becoming part of his everyday life. Whenever he passed that corner, and business or pleasure took him often in that direction, he stopped and bought a bunch of violets. Now and then, while she was putting the flowers in his coat, he spoke a few kind words to her. He was pleased with her quiet answer, and the grave low tone of her voice.

In time he had gathered her history. Her father had been a gentleman of small means; he had drunk himself to destitution, and was drinking himself to death. She looked after him and a younger sister, and was the only breadwinner of the family. It was a sad story, but not an unusual one in that great sea of London, whither all the wrecks of English life are ever drifting and disappearing. He had heard many such stories before, and they had failed to move him. Yet now, the emotional side of his life began to centre round one deep feeling of pity; pity for the fate of this child.

Perhaps his brain had been overworked, and the nervous strain of his life was beginning to tell, for he began to feel as one who is haunted by the features of the dead. The scent of the violets that he always wore now, seemed sometimes to wrap him round as in a trance. The sweet face with its halo of golden hair pleaded with him day and night. Large grey eyes, piteous with terror, seemed to beseech his protection. Evil faces came to him in his sleep, and foul lips crying for the soul of Edith Grange. "I will save her," he said to himself, and this became the secondary purpose of his life.

Poor Noel! He thought ambition had clothed him with an armour of steel, and forgot that there were joints in his harness. Pity for

the unprotected and beautiful? All the world knows what the end of that must be.

First of all he took the girl from her precarious flower-selling life, and apprenticed her to a fashionable dressmaker, promising to start her in a business of her own when she had acquired proficiency in the art. Then he pleaded and remonstrated with her drunken father and endeavoured to brighten her home-life for her. But he did not stop here on the threshold of pity. He was after all only a man, and she was a lovely woman.

Once a terrible temptation came to him. It was but for a moment. His dream rushed upon him as a storm. His better nature triumphed. Yet he could not deny himself the pleasure of her society. Sunday after Sunday he met her outside the smoke and dreariness of London in some small country place, with only her little sister to play propriety. He even gave her his confidence, and told her the dearest wishes of his heart. He painted to her the glorious future before him; told her how his name should be made splendid in history; described to her the fortune his strong right hand would grasp. And as he spoke, his face glowed and his eyes flashed, and he looked as though his foot were upon the neck of the world. And the girl thought him a god, but her eyes grew piteous and her heart died within her, for she saw that ambition and fame are both life and love to him, and that all else must be sacrificed for them.

So day by day the chain was lengthened and made more strong. Just a few trivial moments in a busy ambitious life. They would seem sufficiently paltry and unimportant compared with the splendour he was aiming at, and the fame that the world had already flung at his feet. Yet they were the links of the chain, and God alone knew what it would cost to break them. But the end was very near, for Pity was to die, and Love was to be born to its inheritance of sorrow and of Death.

III.

ONE bright morning in May, a Sunday morning, when all the land was resting and rejoicing in the sunshine of spring, was the day chosen by fate to be marked black with the tragedy of two lives.

They had gone out into the country to have lunch at a farmhouse and return in the afternoon. She was leaning against a stile gazing down the hill across the fields and woods that had burst into their freshest green. He stood by her side, and held one of her hands. The truth had come to him at last. He no longer fooled himself with the belief that pity was the only emotion of his heart. He had cast everything to the winds, and was pleading passionately in his love. The little sister was picking flowers in the next field. They were alone.

"I have told you all, Edith," he said in a low voice. "What have you to tell me?"

Her face grew grave and troubled, and her lips quivered. Her eyes still looked across the landscape, but they saw it through the mist of tears.

"Speak, Edith, speak," he cried. She did not answer, but she looked into his face. He clasped her in his arms and their lips met. Then she broke from him in terror.

"No, no," she cried; "not that, I did not mean that. Oh, what have I done."

He caught her fiercely by the arms and looked straight into her face. "The truth, Edith, the truth. Your face is a living lie if you tell me you do not love me."

She turned away from his piercing eyes and bowed her head. Her lips opened, but they uttered no words. He took her in his arms. She made no resistance, but sobbed passionately.

"Edith, my darling. Will you be my wife? Do you love me?"

"I love you," she murmured, almost to herself. "Oh, what have I said. But you knew it before. Let me go, my dearest one, let me go lest I prove too weak. I can never be your wife." And she tore herself from his arms and stood two yards away. Her face was death-like. She trembled in every limb. Truly the renunciation was more bitter than death itself.

"You love me, Edith, and yet you will not be my wife. I do not understand you."

She drew herself proudly up, and looked at him, as the Christian martyrs may have looked, when they gazed their last at the world that was very dear to them, yet not so dear as the God for whom they died. A great calmness had come over her now.

"I love you, Noel. Before Heaven I say I love you, and it is for love of you that I will never marry you—no, do not speak, or come nearer to me. Do I not know you now, Noel, your brilliant position, the still more brilliant career that is opening out before you in one long path of riches and glory and fame. Do I not know how your whole heart and soul was bound up in your lofty ambitions until you loved me. Do I not know that even now in your calmer moments, ambition is the true love of your life. What is a poor girl's love to all that you would lose to gain it? Is it worth shattered dreams and fallen hopes? I will not marry you. In after years you would curse me because I had stood between you and all that you might have been."

Noel Felton's face grew stern, and his eyes glowed with a dangerous light.

"I am a man," he said, "and the world shall be at my feet, and worship the woman I have made my wife. If any dare to scoff or sneer at her, I will break them—break them as I do this stick," and he hurled the pieces of his cane to the ground.

She looked at him with sorrow and pride. Here was a man for whom it was worthy to die.

"My noble Noel," she said moving slowly towards him and placing her hands upon his shoulders. "My noble Noel. You would sacrifice all that you hold most dear for the woman you love. She will sacrifice all the world for love of you; you are all the world to her. Kiss me, my dearest one. It is the last."

He flung his arms round her with a grip of iron and poured kisses upon her upturned face.

"You shall not go," he cried hoarsely. "You shall not go. You are mad. Do you think that I can never rise to fame with you beside me? Do you think that your poverty or parentage or early life can drag me down? You are mad, I say. My wings shall be strong enough to lift us both; and if not—and if not"—he paused and there was a choking in his throat—"it is better to be loved by you than to be worshipped by all the world beside. You shall not go."

"Noel, my darling Noel, I will never marry you. I know my poverty or parentage or early life would never drag you down. You are so strong, my Noel. Such hindrances would be but straws to your strength. But—but"—and her voice sank to a whisper—"you do not know all."

He let go of her and looked into her eyes as though to read her very soul. She turned them away and bowed her head in shame.

"I do not know all?" he queried slowly, with a terrible darkness upon his face.

"No," she repeated, "you do not know all. There is a reason why I should not become the wife of any man and least of all the wife of the man I love." Her face grew white and drawn. She was dying hard, this womanly child, dying very hard. But her will was as relentless as death.

He turned away, walked a few steps, and came back to her.

"I do not understand you," he said quietly. Then a burst of passion swept over him, and he gripped her shoulders till she winced with pain. "It is false," he cried. "Swear that what you tell me is true. Swear it."

"I swear it," she said steadily, but she did not look at him, "There is a barrier between us that cannot be broken."

The man's face whitened, for a flash of memory struck him and scorched the life within him.

"That cannot be broken," he said slowly and with fearful emphasis. "What can it be?"

"Good-bye!" she whispered, holding out her hands. "Good-bye, Noel! Let it not be said that you were less brave than the woman who loved you. Here comes Sissie. We will go home before you. It is best for the parting to be now. Good-bye, my dearest, my very life!"

He took her cold hand in both of his, and tried to say the words of parting, but could not. Then he cried bitterly, "Look at me, Edith, look at me once!"

She did not raise her head but walked slowly away towards her little sister who was coming across the fields laden with flowers.

"Aren't they pretty, Edith?" she cried gleefully. "Look at these lovely violets! What, are we going? Isn't Mr. Felton coming with us?"

"No, dear; run and say good-bye to him, and—and perhaps he would like some of your violets."

The child ran up to him and gave him the flowers. He looked into her happy little face and sadly contrasted it with the face he loved. "Good-bye, my child!" he said kindly. "Be good to your sister, for the world has gone hard with her!"

In a few minutes they had reached the top of a slight hill. Edith Grange turned and looked back. The sun caught her golden hair for a moment. The child waved. Then they were gone. Noel looked at the bunch of violets in his hand; he pressed them to his lips, and the scent recalled a dreary November evening, so far less gloomy than this sunny morning in May.

"I am alone," he cried bitterly; "alone for all my life!"

IV.

THE next morning a letter lay upon his breakfast table. He knew the handwriting and tore it open feverishly. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAREST ONE—if I may call you so for the last time, for I shall never see you again—I have thought it best that you should know all, and understand what barrier it is that lies between us. I let you think the worst of me yesterday, for I knew the nobility of your heart and that, bad as I really am, you would not relinquish me. Yet, if I had married you I should have deserved every curse that in after years you and your children would have laid upon me. You know that my father is a confirmed drunkard, but you do not know that it has been the grim inheritance of our family for generations. Some have escaped; may God have mercy on my little sister; but I know that I shall not escape. Already the resistless craving is upon me. I am yet young and the grip is not fast upon my life, but it is closing upon me, and will soon crush me body and soul. In after years you will thank God for the strength that was given me yesterday to resign all that I held most dear, and you will thank God that children were not born to you with this curse upon their lives. I did not know till yesterday that you loved me. I do not think you knew yourself; and how should I dream that you, with your great ambitions and talents, could ever do more than pity the poor girl to whom you seemed as a god. I thought the final sacrifice would be mine alone; now I know that two must suffer for the folly of one. I ask your forgiveness for the wrong I have done you; I was weak,

your companionship was so sweet to me. I loved to be with you and to listen to you, my Noel! I loved your compassion, your kindness, your great intellect; they were life to me. Good-bye, Noel! Forgive me my folly! I know that in your great strength and pity you will wish to see me again, and perhaps even wish to marry me. I may be too weak to resist. God does not give such strength, as He gave me yesterday, twice in a lifetime. I shall place myself beyond your reach. When you receive this letter I shall be dead."

Truly this woman was more than a thing of earth. She had given her life for his sake. Greater love hath no man than this.

* * * * *

Lord Felton has never married. Every ambition that his youth dreamed of has been gratified, power, wealth and popularity are beneath his feet. Yet as he sits alone in his gorgeous house and directs the destinies of empires, the scent of violets sometimes steals across the room, and his eyes grow dim, and he knows that there is one thing that will ever be beyond the gift of sovereign or of people.

A MEMORY.

I SIT alone at eventide,
The fire is burning low,
There breaks upon my solitude
A voice of long ago.

I hear again in soft Scotch tones
"Abune sweet Rothesay Bay."
Oh, is it nine long weary years
Ago, or yesterday

I heard you sing your native songs,
So full of charm and grace,
And lived with one transcending joy—
The seeing of your face?

Oh, gayest heart I ever knew!
Oh, life of sunniest glee!
Dear, pierce the shades of absence through—
Return once more to me.

You come, and in that schoolroom quaint
Once more the page we turn ;
Our common interest glows again,
Our fervent fancies burn.

We take sweet solemn vow our feet
In forward paths to set,
Nor on through life, come weal or woe,
Our "promise" to regret.

We roam with "Will" in good greenwood,
We see him shoot the deer ;
We hear a scuffle—ah, he's caught !
His laughter ringeth clear.

What careth he ? The world's a stage—
'Tis but one act the more ;
He'll work it into some fine play—
Increase experience' store.

We love "Althaea" passing fair,
By Richard Lovelace sung ;
We read old Chaucer's jolly tales
In strangely sounding tongue.

We smell Ben Jonson's "rosy wreath,"
And Edmund Waller's "rose" ;
We hear Sir Walter Raleigh fling
"The lie" to honour's foes.

Once more in anxious, puzzled mood
I work the hated sum
In deep dejection, until you
To laughing rescue come.

I curse afresh the evil day
When Euclid saw the light.
Who thought of algebra, to scare
The wits of weary wight ?

The Revolution's bloodied page
We read, and for the woes
Of hapless Marie Antoinette
The tear of pity flows. . . .

I wake at striking of a clock—
Already morn grows old—
I find myself by burnt-out fire,
And you ? In kirkyard cold !

ELIZABETH GIBSON.

THE WIZARD'S WIFE.
A TALE OF CORSICAN REVENGE.

By F. E. M. NOTLEY.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CHALLENGE.

"THE Signor dottore is right," said the fat wine-merchant, breathless with amazement, while an agreeable horror tingled in his veins ; "this is the passage, made ages ago, maybe, for the transit of casks from the wine-press in the convent vineyard to their cellars. You perceive it is constructed on an incline, which permits of the casks rolling gently to the cellar door. I declare I never thought of it when I let the house to Signor da Belba. He agreed to my retaining the cellars, and I fancied the door of communication between them and the house was securely locked and the key in my possession. And if the cellars had not been too full already, I should have stored my wine and rolled my casks down here last autumn. You know I hired the St. Ursuline vineyards long ago, and in the old days this little château of mine was a dependency of the convent, and the wine made on the estate for sale was always stored here. Dear me : to think that an assassin should have entered the house by so cunning a way ! And all these false keys, too, left in the locks ! It is a mercy I am not robbed. I expected to find every cask empty, or perhaps filled with water or some such worthless trash. What a blessing, gentlemen, the assassin has never touched my wines ! The Virgin be praised ! I hope she will find me thankful for her goodness. And the trap-door unbolted, too, that seems the strangest mystery ! Really, the country is not safe ; government must look to it. If locks and bolts won't keep a man's goods secure, what is to become of us, signori ?"

"In this case," answered the doctor drily, "your goods are safe enough. It was life that was wanted, not bad wine."

"Ah, the Signor de Santi always has his joke !" said the merchant, looking affectionately at his depreciated casks. "And so the Signor da Belba succeeded neither in catching the murderer, nor even in seeing him with sufficient distinctness to recognise him ?"

"It appears so," answered the doctor shortly, glancing slightly at Antonio. "You forget how dark it was."

"Ah, and in that is the greatest wonder of all !" exclaimed the little merchant. "It is incomprehensible how a man could traverse

this dungeon of a passage, mount the ladder leading to the upper cellar, unbolt the trap-door through which, you know, we drew up the casks, gain the door conducting to the kitchen corridor, and then safely walk through the house, even to the signor's bedside, without a light, without a mistake, and without disturbing anyone. Really, it is amazing; it looks as if the assassin knew the house so well. And the signor is quite sure the signora was asleep all the time? Ah, what a pity the murderer left no lamp! What a clue that would have been!"

In spite of the cruel suspicion shadowed in the rotund merchant's words, Antonio did not waver in his reply.

"The assassin escaped without a lamp," he said. "And allow me to observe, monsieur, that, after my emphatic assertion that my wife was sleeping soundly when the murderer came to my bedside, it is rude to ask if I was sure of that fact. She slept so soundly that, on my return to her room after my unsuccessful pursuit of the assassin, I found her still undisturbed and unaware of my absence. Let all Ajaccio know that, if any further slander against Madame da Belba be uttered by any evil tongue there after my declaration that I saw and nearly seized the murderer of my children, the slanderer will have to answer to me for the insult."

"Certainly, certainly, monsieur is right," remarked the man of wine, wincing at Antonio's tone.

"And now, Signor Morelli," observed de Santi, "you perceive the reasonableness of our request that new keys should be made to these cellars, and this passage, and the trap-door nailed down."

"Moreover, I must keep the new keys myself," interrupted Antonio, "or else I quit the house instantly."

"The Signor Antonio is an excellent tenant," remarked the merchant uneasily; "but to give up the keys of one's wine-stores is such a risk."

"Is *my* having them a greater risk than their being in the hands of an assassin?" demanded Antonio fiercely. "The man who has murdered my children evidently possesses duplicate keys of these cellars and this passage. I wish to prevent the new ones from falling into his hands. You are careless, signor, of your keys; you left them once for nearly a whole day at the Marquis Delmonte's. Why should I put the lives of my children in the hands of a man who has sworn a vendetta against me?"

"A vendetta against *you*, signor?" said the puffing merchant, breathing slowly on his words. "But what Corsican would be so mean as to let a vendetta fall upon infants? Moreover, the marquis was at sea when the first murder was committed, and he was sick at his own house when the second occurred. I believe the Signor de Santi remained by his side that night."

"I had that honour," replied the doctor in his grimmest manner, "and I look forward to attending the marquis in his last moments—and to boiling his head afterwards," he added mentally.

"And where was the marquis last night?" asked Antonio carelessly.

"I cannot say," answered the fat merchant uneasily; "but I think he was in his own house. He gave me an excellent order yesterday. Oh, the marquis is innocent, quite innocent, and quite a gentleman!"

It is needless to recount further the dispute respecting the keys. With all the sharpness of worldly thought and cunning, the man of barrels, after all, was but a fool.

"Leave my keys with Signor Antonio!" he exclaimed. "Why, his servants will tap my casks; they'll get drunk; they'll sell wine to all the peasants on the hill."

"So you prefer a brigand should have free entrance?" observed de Santi. "There is not a thief in the island who will not know the flavour of your vintage. Perhaps the casks are filled up with water now."

When a worldly man is robbed through his own distrust, suspicion, or general belief in the thievishness and rascality of mankind, there is no self-reproach connected with his loss; his conscience is magnanimously clear, and he acquits himself on the plea of having done his duty. Hence it was that, although the new keys were required for his own protection almost as much as for Antonio's, the cautious merchant could not prevail upon himself to consent to their fabrication, because it would oblige him both to trust and to believe—two things not in his nature—and being compelled to confide in a human being startled him more than robbery and murder. However, the doctor's last speech touched him with a logic he understood, and, being alarmed now for himself, he proposed a scheme, implying as little confidence as possible, by which the new locks should be made secretly, and the keys deposited in a sealed box and left in the hands of de Santi, by which plan certainly the Signor da Belba's servants had no chance of getting at them.

This affair finished, the man of casks rolled himself off quickly to Ajaccio, eager to spread the strange news he had heard.

"And now, my friend," cried the doctor, "tell me the whole of this matter, I entreat you."

"I cannot," answered Antonio mournfully. "Do not ask me."

The doctor's lynx eyes fell keenly on the young man's sorrowful face.

"Have you told your wife?" he asked quietly.

"No, and I never will," responded Antonio firmly. "I have related to her what you have heard me tell the Signor Morelli, that I perceived the assassin in my room, and pursued him through the house to the underground way leading to the convent vineyard, and there he escaped me. That is all I shall ever divulge to Eveline; but to you, my friend," continued Antonio, drawing his chair close to the doctor's, "I confess this more: that this morning early I had an interview in the grounds of the convent with my unhappy cousin

Petronilla, and I wrung from her the fact that, although Delmonte has not killed my children with his own hand, he is, nevertheless, their murderer."

"I knew it," said de Santi eagerly. "I was sure of it."

"And yet," continued Antonio in a despairing voice, "I cannot bring him to justice. He has baffled me; he has won his game; he has taken the cruellest vendetta that ever the evil heart of man conceived."

As he spoke the doctor gazed at him earnestly, and though he strove anxiously to conceal the workings of his face, he was not able to hide from those lynx eyes his anguish and his agitation. Hence a glimmering perception of the truth darted into de Santi's acute mind. He admired Petronilla, he pitied her, he felt gently towards her, and the thought now twisting through his brain grieved him, and brought a shade of pallor upon his sharp, keen, angular face.

"Your cousin——" he said.

He stopped, for at his words Antonio's cheek turned ashy white, and what a moment before had seemed a cruel, daring suspicion this sudden paleness changed into a certainty. Still the doctor, with wonderful presence of mind, went on.

"Your cousin," he said, "has a peculiar temperament—nervous, sensitive, shrinking; her terror of Delmonte has something of madness in it. I have no doubt that by working on her fear he might almost persuade her to any belief in his own powers. Did she pretend he had killed your children by magic?"

"Do not ask me questions, de Santi," cried Antonio, pressing his brow convulsively. "She never pretended the infants were killed without human hands."

The doctor looked at his young friend sorrowfully, and as he looked, his eccentric desire to add Delmonte's head to his museum grew considerably stronger. In fact, he felt this was a scheme he could not possibly give up.

"Don't answer me if I ask questions you dislike," he said kindly. "But do not fancy I have no sympathy for your unhappy cousin. The cruelties of her wretched marriage have often wrung my heart for her. Hers is a passionate nature too, but fortunately she loves no one. What a tool she might become in her husband's hands if she loved, and he knew her weakness!"

As he spoke Antonio felt a deathly sickness overcome him, and he clung to his chair for support, while the doctor, leaning anxiously over the pale, troubled face which the young man turned assiduously from him, felt curiously rushing through his brain a thousand memories of shades in Petronilla's manner, of falterings in her voice, blushes on her white cheek, tears, and trembling lips—all revealing, like lines of light in a dark place, the signs of her painful, secret love for her cousin.

As Antonio slowly recovered himself, the two men grasped each other's hands in silence.

"Is there no other way of bringing Delmonte to justice?" said the doctor at last in a low voice. "If it be impossible to denounce him to the police for this crime, is there nothing else we can do?"

"We can assassinate him, I suppose," said Antonio with a sad smile. "But French rule will scarcely admit of such a Corsican way of proceeding, even if my wife had not so far influenced me with her views, that, Corsican as I am, I look upon the vendetta as a senseless barbarism. I can challenge him; that is the sole way left."

"And is not the duello a senseless barbarism too?" said de Santi. "You shall not challenge him. The last time you fought, it did not suit him to kill you; now your death would be a desirable thing, and he would be delighted to have the chance of running you through. After which he would get safe off, and carry his head with him, and the truth is, I want him to be sent somewhere without that valuable appendage. What do you think of putting Sabiani on him? You know what the police say?"

"Petronilla mentioned strange things to me this morning," answered Antonio with a shudder. "She repeated to me the words of a letter she had read, which could only have come from that wretched woman. But how can we tell Sabiani what we think of his wife? Moreover, the police built their belief on such slight grounds. But stop! here is Sabiani himself riding up the avenue! What can have happened? He is haggard as death!"

How often it occurs thus we all know, that even while we have the name of a friend warm on our lips, a letter, a message, or he himself arrives at our door!

Hurrying to meet him, Antonio found himself clasped by the arm, while the unhappy count, staggering forward, would have fallen but for the timely aid given by this support. His face was so changed that from comely middle age it seemed struck suddenly into senility, and in pitying silence his friends placed him in a chair, and waited breathlessly for the tale they saw hanging on his white lips.

"The villain Delmonte!" he gasped forth. "He has sent me these, and this!"

He drew from his pocket a packet of letters in the Countess Bianca's handwriting, and flung them on the table, while he retained in his hand a letter written in the small, fine, sharp characters peculiar to the marquis.

Antonio and the doctor exchanged glances, but neither spoke, as they rapidly perused this letter:—

"SIGNOR AND DEAR UNCLE,—It is with infinite pleasure that I inclose for your perusal the charming letters of a lady whose love for myself was the original cause of your directing your attention towards her.

"'On revient toujours à ses premières amours,' says the old proverb, and I wonder so wise a man as yourself never reflected either before

or since your marriage on the truth of this saying. It is strange it should be left to me to bring before your eyes so delightful an example of its justice.

"There is a long score between you and me yet to clear off; nevertheless, in consideration of your blindness, I shall now look on one item as crossed out. The others can wait, unless you prefer dying at once, in which case I beg to say I shall remain at home to-day ready to receive any hostile message you may choose to send. My compliments to the Lady Bianca and, while I thank her for the services her ready pen has afforded me, I must add that, for the present, I have no further need of them, and I wish her and you all the happiness you both so richly merit.

"Your loving nephew,

"GIUSEPPE DELMONTE."

"And your wife—where is she?" asked de Santi eagerly, as the letter fluttered from his hand to the floor.

"Have you killed her?" exclaimed Antonio in an agitated voice.

"She is gone," said the count, burying his face in his hands. "A letter reached her early this morning from the Ursuline Convent, and she told me it was a summons from a relation—one of the sisters—who was dangerously sick. She seemed much agitated, and I let her depart without suspicion. I found this letter afterwards on her table. It is from the marchesa."

Antonio, with a deeper pallor on his face, took the tiny slip from the count's hand, and read Petronilla's warning words:—

"MADAME,—It is my husband's intention to betray you this day. Escape for your life! He reckons on the count's slaying you in the first burst of his anger, and thus gaining for himself a double revenge.

"PETRONILLA DELMONTE."

In agitated amazement and fear the doctor and Antonio gazed at each other without speaking. The count broke the silence.

"Will you take my challenge to this villain?" he said. "Either he or I must die this night!"

"I will take your challenge," replied de Santi; "but I doubt if he is in the island. Public opinion will not permit a man to act so cowardly a part towards a woman; he will be cast out from all society here, and I believe he has taken his measures to leave Corsica before he sent those letters to you."

"Then go at once," cried the count, starting up, "ere it be too late. I feel you are right; even in a vendetta Corsicans will not countenance so cowardly a deed as this."

"And where is the countess? Is she with her friends?" asked Antonio, who could not but feel pitifully towards a woman whom he looked on as the victim of Delmonte's revenge and villainy.

"I know not where she is," replied the count in a low, concentrated

voice of fury. "I went to her room meaning to kill her. Let her beware how she meets me!"

At this moment Eveline entered the room with her rosy, laughing boy in her arms. The beauty and happiness beaming on her face, and the love and tenderness shining brightly in her eyes, as she gazed on her husband and child, seemed to strike the count with a new agony. He turned away with a groan, unmindful of her salutation and unable to answer it.

"Antonio," she said, "breakfast is served; will you come?"

The pale looks of her husband and his companions struck her as she spoke, and turning from the count, as though feeling instinctively that the sight of her youth, her love, her joy was a bitterness to him, she whispered eagerly to de Santi:

"Oh, doctor, persuade my husband not to fight that bad man! We cannot prove that he hired an assassin to kill these poor babes! Let us leave Corsica! I fear to let my child quit my arms! Surely it is dreadful to live always in this deadly terror! What has happened to the count?" she added in a whisper.

"Set your mind at rest, dear madame," responded de Santi, avoiding to answer her last question. "Your husband will not challenge Delmonte, I promise you."

Nevertheless, in passing through the verandah to the breakfast-room, Antonio said, in a low voice:

"De Santi, if Sabiani fails to kill that traitor, I will measure swords with him to-morrow."

"Hush!" replied the doctor, lingering a little behind the others that his whisper might not be audible. "You cannot fight him. One thought would unnerve your arm. His wife loves you, and he knew it when he gave you his first challenge. I see it all. I read at last the secret written on Petronilla's pale face in anguish, shame, and sorrow. Where is she now?"

"I begged her to go to her mother's," answered Antonio.

CHAPTER XXII.

BIANCA.

JUST before sunset in a wood near the sea-shore, on the wildest and loneliest part of the island, a man, whose folded arms and calm attitude were belied by the furtive glances of his restless eyes, stood leaning against a tree, evidently awaiting the arrival of friends or enemies. Perchance some slight rustle among the surrounding bushes had deceived him into supposing these near, for, like an actor who wearies of his *rôle* when alone, he started from his position the moment his keen sight had convinced him that no human being was approaching. Then, as if returning to an occupation in which he

had been interrupted, he paced up and down the green sward, observing always where his shadow fell, and glancing at the evening sun, and then at the flickering bars of light and shade that chequered the grass. Sometimes he stopped and extended his arm, as though fencing with an imaginary adversary, and at length, after trying many positions, a smile of triumph lighted up his cold, handsome face, as, standing with feet firmly planted on the grass, he murmured to himself :

"Ah—if he stands here I have him. By the time we are placed this ray now falling on me will touch him obliquely, and blind him just at the right moment. His second will never see it. Antonio is not over-wise at any time, and I have provided for de Santi's absence. Madame da Belba will send for him in haste the moment she finds Petronilla has disappeared."

Again he smiled, passing his small hand over his finely-cut delicate face, as though he caressed himself for his own cunning. At this moment the branches of a thick myrtle close by were set aside, and a woman sprang forward and flung herself before him.

It was the Countess Bianca.

"Giuseppe," she cried, "I have searched for you all day! Twice your servants have turned me from your door! Speak—it cannot be true what your wretched wife has said—you have not betrayed me?"

"Madame," said the marquis, in a cold, sneering tone, "I have merely sent your letters to your husband. Until he reads them he will not comprehend half your talent. Let us understand each other. I want no sentiment—no scene. You have wilfully deceived yourself if you suppose that in seeking you I had any other motive than revenge. Is there pleasure in the tenderness of a traitress?"

Here he shrugged his shoulders, and, turning a step or two away, he added carelessly :

"As to the letter you received from my wife, I can only say, if she told you that your post as spy can be of no further service to me, and I weary of seeing a face that, as a boy, I believed to be true and loyal, she only spoke the truth."

With an air of indifference and well-bred contempt, as though the discussion was now finished for ever, the marquis began to pace the grassy sward, counting his steps as he went.

With whatever faint hope the miserable Bianca may have sought him, it was quenched now. She shivered as his words fell on her, and turned pale as death, standing a moment irresolute ere she gathered courage to make a last appeal. Then she rushed towards him and caught his arm, turning her white, tearful face towards him imploringly.

"Giuseppe," she said, in a voice broken by a deep sob, "you cannot mean what you say! It was but yesterday, in the grotto beneath the mountain, where we have passed so many happy hours, you swore you loved me! Oh, say this is not true—say you are only trying me!

You will take me to France as you promised, and protect me from Sabiani's fury. Oh, Giuseppe—surely we shall yet be happy !”

Coldly looking down on her, with his old smile on his lips, the marquis noted, with critical and sparkling eye, her woeful face, her neglected dress, her forlorn aspect.

“And have I brought the wife of my enemy to this?” he said. “Truly there is an infinite satisfaction in revenge. You do not know me, Bianca *di Sabiani*, or you would not waste words here ; go, weep and pray, and lament before your husband. Show him your tears and your agony ; they will wring his heart—they do not touch me. When I spoke to you of love you forgot my vendetta—is the fault mine ?”

He removed her grasp from his arm and moved away, while the unhappy woman, unable to support herself in her anguish, fell forward with her face on the grass motionless, save for a shiver that ran through her frame. Yet when in his walk he passed her again, she half-raised herself, and clasped his knees passionately.

“And it was all revenge!” she moaned in a low voice. “You never loved me ?”

“Not since I was a boy,” he answered unmoved, “and you forsook me. But I thank you for that treachery ; without it I could never have had the pleasure of seeing Sabiani's wife at my feet, nor of stabbing him, through her, with a keener pain than he ever inflicted on me.”

He would have moved on again, but she held him fast, both her arms still frantically clasping his knees.

“Giuseppe,” she gasped forth, “you cannot be in earnest. I have no home. You will not desert me—you will not leave me to Sabiani's fury. My friends are poor—obscure ; they cannot protect me. I shall be imprisoned, disgraced, cast into the streets. You will save me—you will send me to France or Italy. I will go into a convent. I will not trouble you. It will not cost you much to save me. Oh, Giuseppe, you say you loved me once—do not desert me—I who have lost all for you.”

The marquis heard this despairing appeal unmoved ; save for the cold smile on his lips, his face remained impassive as he answered her :

“You are mistaken, madame, in me. You waste time : the arguments you bring act against you. Cannot your acute mind perceive that all my actions have been prompted by my burning wish to bring disgrace and shame upon the name of Sabiani ? To spare you one misery would be to spare your husband. The world may call me a coward—that is, the Corsican world, which I leave to you and my enemies ; I shall find myself happy enough elsewhere, and I shall glory in knowing that the wife of my worst foe is an outcast here, and he himself a morose, forlorn, homeless man. His cruelty and cynicism have made me what I am ; it was his hand sharpened the weapon that has struck him. I, too, am homeless, wifeless, childless.

Envenomed and embittered by lifelong wrongs, shall I not have revenge? Release your clasp, madame! You set my brain on fire, you unnerve my arm; I shall not be able to kill your husband, and I want to kill or half kill him before I depart for Venice. Will nothing make you let me go, woman?—not even when you know I hate and despise you!”

As she listened to these cruel words, spoken in a tone more brutal than any he had ever dared use, her clasp on his knees became tighter and tighter, till in his attempt to extricate himself he stumbled and nearly fell. At that moment she sprang up, and, drawing a short poniard, stabbed him in the side. The wound was so slight it scarcely drew blood, but as he felt the smart an expression of demoniac fury shadowed his features. It seemed as though it only needed a touch of pain to make his evil spirit fling off all the trammels of caution, cunning, and reserve by which he held it in. Seizing her wrist with a cry of vengeance and hate, he wrenched the poniard from her hand, and struck her to the heart. She fell, and died almost before he knew his blow had touched her, and while the horrible execration he had uttered was still hissing between his hot lips.

As he looked upon his deed he turned ghastly pale, and leant against a tree for support. His deathly fear shone in every line of his finely-cut face, the features seemed suddenly turned to stone, and that flitting expression of sneaking cowardice, of treacherous murder, that sometimes passed over them now fixed there for ever, branding him with his crime in the sight of all men. He, the coward who avoided crime so safely—he, the arch villain who had wrought upon a weak, shaken mind, through terror and necromantic power, to do his vile and bloody deeds for him—here he stood now in the great eye of the setting sun, a murderer, fit food for the scaffold, a cowardly assassin for whom even French law would find no mercy.

A frightful stillness reigned around him. A moment before, the passionate sobs of the murdered woman and his own cold sneering tones filled the evening air; now death and silence sat not only upon her white face, but upon tree and sky, leaf and shadow, and the parched grass to which his feet seemed rooted in immovable despair. A horrible stupefaction clouded his brain, and it was only by an immense effort he flung it off, and his sharp intellect, cleared of its momentary darkness, now began to devise means of safety and escape.

“Miserable woman,” he murmured, “she has brought it on herself. I slew her in self-defence. I have nothing to fear.”

His actions belied his words, for, with a furtive glance at the still accusing form, which lay so near his feet that her blood oozed among the grass beneath them, he struck into the wood, and walked hurriedly in the direction in which he expected to meet Antonio and his seconds.

Pale and stark, the victim of his cruel vendetta and rage lay in the glow of the setting sun, with the long shifting shadows of evening creeping slowly and greily towards her, like the darkness of death and oblivion.

In less than ten minutes, Delmonte met two groups of gentlemen coming towards him from opposite directions. In the foremost group he recognised his second, Ottavio, and a surgeon; in the other he observed Antonio and Sabiani.

The marquis took off his hat to these latter as he gave his hand to his friend Ottavio.

"*Mio caro*," he said carelessly, "it is well you have brought a surgeon. I am wounded before I have fought. Signor da Belba, your friend must choose another ground. Twenty minutes ago, as I stood there awaiting you, Madame la Contessa di Sabiani favoured me with an unexpected interview, and this wound——"

He pulled out the slightly reddened cambric from his bosom, and turned towards the surgeon, who immediately hastened to examine the scratch. As he was doing this, Delmonte turned his head with an assumption of interest towards Ottavio, saying in a low but perfectly audible voice:

"If it be possible, I think someone should go into the wood where I left Madame di Sabiani, and conduct her to a place of safety. She was desperate, and threatening suicide when I left her."

These words maddened Sabiani.

"The coward has wounded himself in order to avoid this duel!" he cried, endeavouring to spring forward, while Antonio held him back with a strong hand. "Draw your sword, sir, or I'll kill you where you stand!"

Very pale, but still self-possessed, Delmonte bowed, and replied with cold, sarcastic politeness:

"If this gentleman tells me that this stab from Madame Bianca's fair hand is no hindrance, I am perfectly willing to give her husband all the satisfaction possible. It appears both husband and wife are thirsting for my blood. It is very long, I believe, since monsieur and madame were so cordially of one mind."

These sneering words and the cool tone in which they were uttered twitched Ottavio's lips with a concealed smile, while they exasperated Sabiani to the verge of fury. The rage and disgust that ran hotly through his veins took from him all self-possession. Further parley became almost impossible; still the surgeon tried calmly to pour some oil on the raging waters.

"This wound is a mere scratch; it is certainly no hindrance to the duel," he said. "The poniard glanced aside, and has only cut the skin; but, instead of fighting, would it not be better to seek the unhappy lady——"

"Place us, gentlemen!" shouted Sabiani in a husky voice of fury. "There is no need to go deeper into the wood; this spot will do!"

At these words Ottavio drew Antonio aside, and the preliminaries of the duel were hastily arranged, in spite of the latter's earnest wish to wait for the arrival of de Santi, who ought even now to be with them, he observed.

"One surgeon is surely enough," answered Ottavio, "and the sun is fast setting. Let us finish this affair while there is light for it."

Accordingly, the two gentlemen hastened to place the combatants, and both parties drew their swords. Scarcely, however, had the weapons crossed, with that cold, clear clash which rings through the heart as no other sound can, when the doctor, de Santi, with the humour in his keen grey eyes quenched in strange sadness, appeared suddenly, and held his hand high in the air.

"Hold!" he cried in a firm voice. "Signor di Sabiani, put up your sword—you cannot fight a murderer!"

Delmonte grew sick at these words, and, turning in sudden faintness, seized his second by the arm.

"My wound hurts me," he said in a low voice; then he added, in a louder tone: "Who dares call me assassin?"

"I," answered de Santi sadly. "I was a witness to your interview with Bianca di Sabiana. I would have saved her life if I could, but your quick hand struck too swiftly and too surely. I have just probed her wound. You struck at her heart with a true aim. I have not quitted your steps for a single moment this day since twelve o'clock, Signor Delmonte."

A ghastly pallor overspread the marquis's face, but the instinct of self-preservation was strong in him still.

"If Madame di Sabiani be dead," he said, "she died by her own hand. Is it becoming in a gentleman to dog a man's steps in disguise?"

As he spoke, the spectators observed that de Santi was dressed in the garb of a peasant, and carried in his hand a tall slouched hat and a long white beard. But there was little time for question; the measured tramp of *gens d'armes* drew near, and, while some surrounded Delmonte as their prisoner, others passed on, bearing the body of the unhappy Bianca between them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VENDETTA.

A FRIGHTFUL mystery complicated and enhanced the horrors of Delmonte's trial. His unhappy wife had disappeared; she left the convent at eight o'clock in the morning on the day of Bianca's murder, and had never been seen since.

One of the sisters deposed to having found her at sunrise in the chapel prostrate before the cross weeping passionately, praying in

incoherent words mingled with sobs, while her wild and haggard looks betrayed a grief too deep for utterance.

Fearing she was seized with fever, the nun ran for help, and, returning with other sisters, they carried her to her bed, where she sank into a heavy slumber, through which they watched her, often thinking her pale face wore the semblance of death.

On awaking, she asked piteously and like a child for her mother. She could sleep again, she said, if her mother was there to kiss and pardon her. Her pride, her reserve, her silence all seemed broken down, and, suddenly flinging her wasted arms around the nun's neck, she asked her in a broken voice, while her tears flowed gently, if God was not a God of love, who would forgive the frantic sins of madness and of fear?

"Yes, yes," the sister answered, soothing her with pitying words and kisses. "Poor lady!" said the weeping nun in court, "A gentler, kinder, more patient lady never lived; how could she have sinned? She was even as a bruised lamb, which a shepherd would carry tenderly in his arms and nurse back to health and joy."

As the sister spoke, tears fell from Antonio's eyes, and after grasping de Santi's hand he left the court hurriedly.

Then the evidence went slowly on, showing how Petronilla had called for her confessor, and after a long conference with him had quitted the convent on foot, saying she would brave her husband's anger, and go to her mother's and stay there till God took her. It was but a mile down the slope of the hill to Madame da Belba's villa, so the Ursulines let her depart without anxiety, although she was weak from her recent illness and the strange agitation of her tears and prayers that morning.

But she never reached Madame da Belba's house, and as that lady knew nothing of her intention, she was not missed, nor were any inquiries made for her till noon that day, when Eveline da Belba came to her aunt and said:

"Let me see Petronilla, and ask her forgiveness for many foolish, evil thoughts I have harboured towards her in old times. I am glad she is come to live with you, and will leave her wicked husband for ever."

"But she is not with me!" cried her unhappy mother, starting up with sudden fear.

"The Ursulines have just told me she left them at eight o'clock to come to you," said Eveline, "and she told them she would never return to Delmonte."

We will pass over all description of the hurried search, the terror, the grief that followed this announcement. Suffice it to say that all search was fruitless, all inquiries were vain. It was now the sixth day since Bianca's murder, and the third of Delmonte's trial, and no clue had transpired which could lead to the secret of the unfortunate Petronilla's fate. Her confessor was examined, but, according to

the practice of Catholic courts, he was asked no question touching on things told him under the seal of confession. For the rest, he could only say with the nun, that the Lady Delmonte had quitted the convent with the avowed intention of going to her mother's.

It was observed as the good priest gave his evidence that his cheek blanched, and a shudder fell over him as his eye fell on the prisoner.

Then according to the custom of the French courts the accused was interrogated, examined, and cross-examined, but nothing could be elicited beyond his first statement—that he had not seen his wife since the evening before the day of Bianca's death, when she had retired to the convent, by his permission, to pass a week in prayer and praise for her recovery from sickness.

He was arraigned on two counts—the murder of the Countess di Sabiani, and the imprisonment or concealment of his wife.

He pleaded on the first that he had wounded Bianca accidentally in wrenching the poniard from her hand, and he had acted in self-defence, and was not aware of her death till informed of it by *de Santi*. On the second, he pleaded "Not guilty," averring, also, during his examination, with much acuteness and intelligence, that his wife was insane, and had been out of her mind for a long time, and his sole crime was in concealing this fact from her family, but he had kept it secret out of compassion to her mother. In proof of his assertion he related the story of her attempted suicide in Brittany, and told how she never occupied herself in books, work, or music, but wandered restlessly through the house and garden, her sole amusement being to sketch on scraps of paper one face.

"Whose face?" they asked.

"It bore no name," answered the accused; "but it was the face of a young man always drawn in a menacing and reproachful aspect."

The prisoner glanced furtively at Antonio, who was in court again, and marked the whiteness of his lips with a smile.

Then servants were called to prove his assertions of *Petronilla's* insanity, and they bore witness to such strange words and deeds on their mistress's part that at last the saying gained credence that she was mad, and many believed she had wandered away that day to the mountains, and, perchance, now lay dead or dying in some solitary wood. And, in particular, the evidence of one servant went far to prove her madness.

"The marquise," she said, "was very strange at times, and once had bidden her never to enter her room when she saw on her arm a certain golden bracelet, fastened by a padlock bearing a cameo of wreathed serpents. 'For at such times, my poor girl,' she said, 'I have a spirit of murder in me, and I should fly at your throat and kill you.'"

"What need of more!" said Delmonte's counsel. "The unfortunate lady is mad; she has committed suicide, or she is wandering

now a maniac in the wilds of the island. My client must be acquitted on this charge."

And acquitted he was; but he was found guilty of the murder of Bianca di Sabiani, and condemned to death. Even French law could find no extenuating circumstances to plead in his behalf. Corsican prejudices would have discovered many excuses for a vendetta; but they saw none for the cowardice and treachery which drew a woman into sin only to betray her to her husband and abandon her to his fury.

The evidence of Doctor de Santi, slowly and deliberately given, was the crowning point which gave Giuseppe Delmonte to the guillotine.

Throughout the trial no word was said touching the death of Antonio's children, and no whisper uttered of that foul murder in Brittany, and yet every eye saw and every heart felt, as the prisoner was removed from the bar, that he was condemned for one of the least of his crimes.

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It was the evening before Giuseppe Delmonte's execution, when the door of his cell slowly opened, admitting two figures. One, a lady, walked with feeble steps, leaning heavily on her companion's arm. Her face was pale and haggard, and her hair, white as snow, seemed, by its luxuriant length, to have silvered more from sorrow than from age.

"Giuseppe," she said, throwing up her long, black veil and standing trembling before him, "have mercy on me! Where is my daughter? Where is Petronilla?"

"Have my enemies come to triumph over me?" asked Delmonte, glancing at the man who stood by Madame da Belba's side.

"Not so," she hastened to answer, while tears rained over her face, and her voice broke in its anguish; "we are come as suppliants. Have pity on me, Giuseppe! Tell me where I shall find my daughter!"

The marquis folded his arms, with a horrible rattle of his chain in the movement, looked at her, and smiled.

Then Antonio came forward, and his voice shook exceedingly as he spoke.

"Delmonte," he said, "I forgive you all the ill you have done to me; do somewhat for me in return. Tell this heart-broken woman where her daughter is; let your wretched wife spend the remainder of her sorrowful life with her mother."

"Near you?" answered Delmonte, and, tightening his arms, he hugged his chain closer.

"No," replied Antonio in deep sadness; "I leave Corsica for ever in a week. I am going to England with my young wife and child."

A spasm passed over Delmonte's hard face. The thought that happiness was still left to Antonio was gall and bitterness to him. One vengeance only was left, and he took it.

"Leave me," he said in his hardest tone. "What do I know of Petronilla? You have hidden her yourselves to prejudice the world against me."

"Oh, Giuseppe!" cried Madame da Belba, sinking on her knees, and striving to clasp his hand. "Have mercy, have mercy! She is my only child! You cannot be so cruel—you will tell me where she is? Oh, my child, my child! Shall I never see her again?"

Stricken down by her anguish, Madame da Belba fell fainting on to the floor, while Delmonte, calm and unmoved, looked at her with a gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

"Fate is not altogether hard," he said; "it gives me a gleam of comfort still. And you too," he added, gazing at Antonio as the turnkey bore away the insensible form of Petronilla's mother, "have you none of the iron of this misery in *your* flesh?"

Antonio shivered at his words, but answered in a steady voice:

"Not such iron as you think of, Delmonte. I loved Eveline when I married her—I love her still. Since my boyish days I have never felt for Petronilla aught but the affection of a brother and a friend."

The marquis ground his teeth together audibly, but made no reply.

"It is you," continued Antonio, "who have overthrown a noble nature through the one weakness which she cherished in her soul. Have I harmed her through it? No, it is you who, by that avenue—that sin if you will—have poured upon her all this guilt and sorrow. Her unhappy passion has been the spring by which your evil spirit moved her at your will. I recognise the fact that, by this passionate weakness of the heart, she has been made to do what her soul loathes—she has become a tool in your vile hands. She has confessed all this. Prone in the dust, clinging to the cross, she told her sorrow and her sin. 'Let no woman,' she said, 'cherish an unlawful love, and deem herself innocent because she holds it secret. No, it is a fester, a canker round which all evil grows—through which devils enter the soul, and fling down every barrier which keeps out crime.' Delmonte, through this guilt, this mad love of hers for me, you have worked upon her fear, her terrors, to stain her hand with murders which *you* planned to satiate your vengeance. I have said that I forgive you—not for what you have done to me and mine will you suffer to-morrow. I have held my peace throughout your trial. In return show me this kindness—say where and with whom you have hidden Petronilla; and let me, ere I leave Corsica for ever, see that she is succoured, and safe with her mother for the rest of her unhappy life."

"Is your sermon ended?" asked Delmonte with a sneer. "I am at your mercy in these chains. You may insolently boast of my wife's love for you, and magnanimously declare yourself a saint; I cannot resent your insults now."

"Delmonte!" exclaimed Antonio eagerly.

"I thought you had finished," responded the marquis coldly. "If so, listen to me. I have nothing to tell you respecting Petronilla. Shall I deprive my last hours of their sole triumph? I have the joy now of knowing that I leave Sabiani a legacy of wretchedness, and you a gnawing pain which will never leave you to your life's end. One thing more: if I could have divulged during my trial where Petronilla is, or if I knew now, it should only be to denounce her to justice. I would prove to the world her guilt as the slayer of your children; I would proclaim aloud her miserable love for you. Leave me! Surely you have had your money's worth now in insults to a dying man, and the heavy bribe you have paid for this secret interview is well spent. Go! if you stay another moment I call to the gaoler and denounce my wife."

Delmonte rose as he uttered these words, and called to the turnkey in a loud voice:

"I want to see no strangers," he said as the man entered. "Take your visitor away."

Sorrowfully Antonio departed, merely bowing his head to the doomed man as he passed through the heavy door. In the long gloomy corridor of the prison he met the lean figure of de Santi.

"Failed!" was all he said. Then covering his face with his hands, he burst into tears.

The doctor took the young man's hand kindly.

"Go to Madame da Belba," he whispered, "she has more need of comfort than you. Take her to your own house, and bid your wife be a daughter to her. I will try what I can do with this assassin. I will wring from him if I can in what prison, convent, or madhouse he has hidden Petronilla. Yet in all the island, Antonio, save you and I, there is scarcely a man believes that he knows aught about her. It is hard to give people *our* knowledge of Delmonte. I almost failed to-night where I most wished to succeed."

So saying, the doctor showed the gaoler a pass from the governor of the prison, which opened for him wide the door of Delmonte's cell.

He entered, abruptly motioning the gaoler to stand by him.

"Marquis," he said in French, "the governor suspected that I wished to aid you to escape. Such a thing might be possible if you *bribed* me heavily enough, do you understand? But it cannot be; every precaution is taken against it; this man has orders not to leave us. However, he only understands our Corsican tongue, so we can speak freely. Let us proceed to business. All men have their hobbies; yours have been murder and vengeance, mine is more simple. I have been afflicted for a long time by an intense desire to have your head, and boil it, and place it in my museum. This wish has pursued me from the first day I witnessed the sufferings of your wife, when, convulsed by spasms and strange agonies, you called me to her bedside. I believed that by mesmerism, magnetism, and devilism you tortured her, and I burned to examine at my ease the cranium

which covered so fiendish a brain. I have gained my hobby. I buy your head to-morrow of the executioner."

"Here is another coward who finds it easy to insult a chained man," said Delmonte; "easier still when death is so near him that you stand in its shadow when you enter this cell."

The doctor winced, and a slight quiver on his lip told that the shaft had struck home.

"If I had not had some hope to hold out to you, I should not have spoken thus," he answered. "Your hobby is vengeance: renounce it, and I too will give up mine. I am directed by one high in authority to tell you that if you will divulge the secret of your wife's disappearance, your sentence will be commuted to *travaux forcés* for life. Speak, and your head remains on your shoulders, and the niche prepared in my museum will never be filled."

A deep, dark flush shadowed Delmonte's face: a rush of blood—the blood of life and hope—brought fire to his eyes and a sound like the singing of summer birds to his ears. Then, as the flood of life went back to his heart, his face grew deadly pale, and, sickened and faint, he leaned against the stone wall of the cell for support.

Silently the doctor watched him, and counted every breath that rose from his panting chest.

"It is a life of infamy, of torture, of daily anguish insupportable, that you offer me," he said.

"Still it is *life*," answered de Santi, "and your skull will never pass beneath my fingers. I shall die long before you, is not that consoling?"

A momentary smile passed over Delmonte's handsome features, but it died away in a quiver on his lips; his head sank on his chest—he seemed to give his whole soul to the question of life or vengeance. A deep silence reigned like a visible tremor in the cell, and de Santi feared to move a hand or foot of his own trembling frame as he watched this frightful deliberation of the murderer.

Five minutes passed thus—minutes that had an Egyptian weight of years upon them—minutes during which the blood went drop by drop through the heart like some slow, maddening torture. Then the finely-cut face was raised, and the doctor's hope sank as he saw the smile that moved the chiselled lips and showed the gleaming teeth within.

"I have chosen," said Delmonte, and the smile grew broader now, displaying two cruel rows of glistening ivory like those of a beast of prey. "I am a Corsican. *LA VENDETTA* is dearer than life."

De Santi gazed at him with the earnest look of a man used to read men—he saw the inflexibility of the cold glittering eye, and the deadly smile on the pale lip, and bowing his head silently he left the cell.

On the day of Delmonte's execution, Antonio and Eveline were with Madame da Belba, whom they had vainly implored to take shelter with them.

"No, if Petronilla lives!" she said, "and can escape from the prison where that assassin has placed her, it is to my house she will come. If she found it empty and dark, she might turn away to die in the wood. She would not go to your house, Antonio, even if she guessed her mother was beneath its roof."

Silently Antonio felt this was true, and his entreaties ceased. So with some new hope springing up in their souls they renewed the vain search for the lost Petronilla. But her mother sat still and speechless, watching breathlessly for some sign from the prison that her wizard son-in-law was no longer a denizen in the flesh. The sign came; then she rose and clasped her hands above her head with a low cry.

"He can torture my daughter no longer," she said in a dreadful whisper. "There is a God in heaven who will not permit the dead to tyrannise over the living. Petronilla will come to me; the spell that has chained her is broken."

In this firm conviction, while the futile search continued, and all others felt their hopes die, she sat night after night, watching and waiting, with door unbolted and light in her window. Antonio shared her vigil.

It was the fourth night after Delmonte's just death that her patient love met its reward. Amid the stillness of the starry night a faint cry touched her ear, a soft faltering step drew near. Rushing to the portico she saw, with brow touching the door-step, the prostrate form of a woman.

"Petronilla!" she cried into the darkness.

But there was neither answer nor movement. Then she lifted the inanimate figure, which was light in her arms as a fragile child, and carried her beneath the gleam of the lamp.

It was indeed Petronilla, but so wasted and worn that she seemed but a shadow of herself. Her robe was torn, her hands bleeding as though she had fought her way through rocks, her face wore a look of famine and terror. Then Madame da Belba sank beneath her burden, and called on Antonio for help. Together, they carried her to the room which had been hers when a happy young girl. Here, for the first time, she opened her sad eyes, and gazed on the dear familiar scene with a faint smile. But in another instant her glance fell on Antonio, a strong shudder shook her frame, and she lapsed into unconsciousness.

For days she lay thus, partly sensible at times, and murmuring of happy girlish days, but never uttering her husband's name, or asking a question concerning him. In spite of all de Santi's unremitting care, she never quite recovered her full powers of mind. A merciful hand had been laid upon her memory, and taken from it the recollection and horror of her sufferings, and the mystery of that wizard form which had held a torturing spell over flesh and spirit. Only in sleep and dreams a few broken words would now and then reveal to her mother some glimpse of her imprisonment.

"He has left me food," she murmured one night in a whisper full of horror. "Yes, I can live for a little time."

Suddenly awakening, she cried out, "Mother, am I really with you?"

"Yes, dear child, safe and happy with me."

"I had a dream," she said. And so slept again quietly.

Another night, as her mother leant over her watching her agitated breathing, she spoke distinctly in the very tones of Delmonte. "You shall make no more confessions. You will never be found again. No! not till the day of doom." Then stretching out her hands helplessly, she said in her own voice: "Where am I? It is all dark."

Gently her mother awoke her, and she looked up in her face and smiled like a rosy child.

"You were dreaming, Petronilla."

"Ah, yes, mother, but the dreams are growing less and less. There is a great burden lifted and gone. What has happened? Who is dead and taken far away to some distant dark world—yes, dark—chained in darkness. No! do not tell me now. Wait till the sunlight is around us."

So with the dear sunshine around them she was told next day of Delmonte's end. From that time she never mentioned him, or dreamed again of old sufferings. At last, when apparently in health to bear questioning, she could or would divulge nothing of her mysterious imprisonment. A deathly paleness, a sudden gasping of the breath, showed de Santi that if she had chosen silence, then silence was best for her, and he forbade all future questioning.

"Perhaps some fear of that man still rests upon her," he said, "or maybe some divine compassion for his miserable soul has seized upon her and keeps her lips closed. And it is better so; he is past earthly punishment, and she is safe and at peace."

Yes, she was at peace. Some angel's hand had erased from her brain the terrible memories of her life. All her past years were a blank to her now, only in her shaken mind there was ever a dark cloud between her and Antonio, a veil which she must not dare to lift. She would not even see him to say farewell.

Thus she lived tranquilly and silent until her mother's death, and then she took the veil in a French convent.

Long before this, Antonio and Eveline had quitted Corsica for ever. They settled in the West of England, where they were joined by Eveline's father, and the rest of their days were spent in peace.

Antonio was noticed as a grave man, and many, in spite of his happiness in his own home, suspected that he had a secret grief; but he never spoke of this to his wife, neither did he ever tell her the secret of his children's death. Indeed, while Eveline lived, he was never heard to speak of Petronilla, but when an old man and a widower, he related this story to his grandchildren.

THE END.

THIS WORLD A DREAM.

"Surely it is not a melancholy conceit to think we are all asleep in this world ; and that the conceits of this life are as mere dreams to those of the next, as the phantasms of the night to the conceits of the day."

—*Sir Thomas Browne* : "*Religio Medici*."

EVEN to such an abnormally wide-awake man as Dickens this life presented itself, at least on one occasion, as a dream from which we are to be awakened by death. "Ah, me ! ah me !" he wrote on the going hence of a friend, "this tremendous sickle certainly does cut deep into the surrounding corn when one's own small blade has ripened. But this is all a dream, maybe, and death will wake us."

"Is there another life ? Shall I awake and find all this a dream ?" asked poor Keats. And he answered himself, as so many other poets have done : "There must be ! We cannot be created for this sort of suffering." The thought was only a repetition in the near prospect of death (he died a few months later) of one to which Keats had already given expression in the following lines written at the age of eighteen, "On Death" :

"Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by ?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.

How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
His rugged path ; nor dare he view alone
His future doom—which is but to awake."

Shelley's lines on the death of Keats, from *Adonais*, rise inevitably to the mind in this connection—

"Peace, peace ! he is not dead, he doth not sleep !
He hath awakened from the dream of life.
'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife . . .
He has outsoared the shadow of our night . . .
He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he."

The passage bears a deeper significance than its context would seem to justify. But, to borrow Keble's saying, uttered, however, in reference to other poets than Shelley and Keats—

"As little children dream and tell of Heaven,
So thoughts beyond their thoughts to those high bards were given.

In sleep, the mind is open to all sorts of wild impressions and vague unreasoning fears that pass over it like clouds on wings of storm and blackness, leaving their shadows behind. And so too is the dream of life haunted all through by dim uneasiness.

"Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realised."

Even the cheerful Herrick sings—

"In this world, the Isle of Dreams,
While we sit by sorrow's streams,
Tears and terrors are our themes,
Reciting.

But when once from hence we fly,
More and more approaching nigh
Unto young Eternity,
Uniting.

In that whiter island where
Things are evermore sincere,
Candour here and lustre there
Delighting.

There no monstrous fancies shall
Out of hell a horror call,
To create or cause at all
Affrighting."

Few have been more subject to these depressing influences than Coleridge, and it was he who wrote—

"Believe thou, O my soul,
Life is a vision shadowy of truth;
And vice and anguish, and the wormy grave,
Shapes of a dream! The veiling clouds retire,
And lo! the throne of the redeeming God
Wraps in one light earth, heaven, and deepest hell!"*

A view of life he maintained to the end.

Many poets, the Answerers, as Whitman calls them, of life's enigmas, consider the darker aspects of life merely as shadows cast from our mortality, through which gleams and glimpses of a brighter world continually break. George Herbert, in his poem "Dotage," speaking of the unsubstantial quality of earth's joys, and the stubbornness of her griefs, breaks out in a strain one would hardly have expected from the author of the poem beginning,

"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,"

* 'Religious Musings' (Christmas Eve, 1794).

and who was not wont to glorify even heaven at the expense of this world—

“But, oh, the folly of distracted men !

Who griefs in earnest, joys in jest pursue ;
Preferring, like brute beasts, a loathsome den
Before a Court, even that above so clear,
Where are no sorrows, but delights more true
Than miseries are here !”

Moore attaches the same unreal character to both the joys and sorrows of this life—

“This world is all a fleeting show

For man's illusion given ;
The smiles of joy, the tears of woe,
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow—
There's nothing true but Heaven !”

“I am very fond of photographs,” wrote Longfellow in a letter. “Did you ever examine what the photographers call the *negative*, in which all that is to be light is dark, and the reverse? If so, you will feel how beautiful was the remark made by a brother-in-law of mine—that this world is only the *negative* of the world to come, and what is dark here will be light hereafter.”

Dr. George Macdonald, in the mystical, beautiful strain of which he is a master, has put into language so far as such incommunicable feelings can be put into language, in “Lilith,” the impression as of one about to wake from a vivid dream, which no doubt comes over almost everyone, even the least imaginative, at times, and in the very midst, perhaps, of some exciting scene.

“Now and then, when I look round on my books, they seem to waver as if a wind rippled their solid mass, and another world were about to break through. Sometimes when I am abroad, a like thing takes place; the heavens and the earth, the trees and the grass appear for a moment to shake as if about to pass away; then, lo, they have settled again into the old familiar face! At times I seem to hear whisperings around me, as if some that loved me were talking of me; but when I would distinguish the words, they cease, and all is very still. I know not whether these things rise in my brain, or enter it from without. I do not seek them; they come, and I let them go.

“Strange dim memories, which will not abide identification, often, through misty windows of the past, look out upon me in the broad daylight, but I never dream now. It may be, notwithstanding, that, when most awake, I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more.”

“The imagination,” remarks Keats, with delightful suggestiveness, “may be compared to Adam's dream—‘He awoke and found it truth.’” The dream, as will be remembered, occurs in ‘Paradise

Lost,' where Adam, having sought companionship in vain from all around him, wearied with his loneliness, falls asleep at last and dreams of his as yet unmet-with Eve. Recounting the dream to his celestial visitor, Raphael, he concludes :—

"She disappeared and left me dark ; I waked
To find her, or for ever to deplore
Her loss, and other pleasures all abjure :
When out of hope, behold her, not far off,
Such as I saw her in my dream, adorned
With all that earth or heaven could bestow
To make her amiable."

Adam's dream, with its rapturous waking to joy, seems to link itself with Milton's own dream, as told in one of his best-known sonnets, of his dead wife who appeared to him, "like Alcestis from the grave," clad all in white :—

"Her face was veiled ; yet to my fancied sight
Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shined
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But, oh, as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked ; she fled ; and day brought back my night."

To these lines, so touching in their presentment of the mighty poet, after his brief dream-vision of bliss, bereft at daybreak of love and light at once, may we not apply Keats's saying? May we not trust that the blind poet awoke at last from life's long shadows and found his dream truth?

Coleridge, in "*Animâ Poetæ*," has this lovely passage : "I awake and find my beloved asleep, gaze upon her by the taper that feebly illumines the darkness, then fall asleep by her side ; and we both awake together for *good* and *all* in the broad daylight of heaven."

One of our forgotten and depreciated laureates, William Whitehead, has given expression to the thought, in his poem "*The Firmament*," in stanzas which might have added to the fame of a better poet :—

"This world I deem
But a beautiful dream
Of shadows that are not what they seem ;
Where visions arise,
Giving dim surmise
Of the sights that shall meet our waking eyes.

I gazed o'erhead
Where Thy hand hath spread
For the waters of heaven their crystal bed ;
And stored the dew
In its depths of blue,
Which the fires of the sun come tempered through.

Soft they shine
Through that pure shrine,
As beneath the veil of Thy flesh divine
Beamed forth the light
That was else too bright
For the feebleness of a sinner's sight.

And such I deem
The world will seem
When we waken from life's uncertain dream,
And burst the shell
Where our spirits dwell
In this wondrous ante-natal cell."

And, in his emphatic style, Browning, in "Amphibian," concludes of those who have passed beyond our sight:—

"Whatever they are, we seem :
Imagine the thing they know.
All things they do, we dream ;
Can Heaven be else but so ?"

P. W. ROOSE.



**"HE WENT OUT OF THE CITY INTO BETHANY,
AND HE LODGED THERE."**

HIS triumph past, His passion drawing nigh,
He who should die to heal the whole world's woes
Must first remember Bethany, and those
Dear friends He loved. O, hearts that beat so high
With love, yet fear lest God your love deny,
Behold the Man ! He loved—be done with fears !
He wept, and made more sacred all our tears—
He wept, and at that thought our tears we dry !
Lord, in Thy heaven we could not reach to Thee,
But Thou with human hands dost lift us where
Our trembling thought may touch infinity
And live—our dazzled, mortal eyes may dare
Look through these shadows of our days and nights,
Look through the darkness to the Light of lights.

M. A. M. MARKS.



THE LAFARGE DIAMOND ROBBERY.

AFTER more than half a century, the celebrated poisoning case of which Madame Lafarge was the heroine, is still notorious. In the shadow of that great crime, the other charge upon which she was previously tried and convicted, has been almost lost sight of. As a history of criminal ingenuity, however, the earlier trial is, perhaps, the more remarkable of the two.

The opening events date back as far as 1836. About Easter in that year, two girls were in the habit of attending the Church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule in Paris. One of them was Marie de Nicolai, a young lady of noble family. The other was her particular friend, Marie Cappelle, the daughter of a military officer: an orphan, by no means rich, but clever, lively, and agreeable.

At Saint-Philippe-du-Roule they frequently met a gentleman of striking appearance. In fact, not only there but in other places, he began to haunt their steps. Mademoiselle de Nicolai's governess, by whom they were accompanied, was not unobservant. But being a middle-aged lady of innocent mind, she supposed it to be either business or chance that took the handsome stranger so often the same way as themselves. The young ladies knew better. With a power of perception not uncommon at their age, they perfectly understood the matter; they were as conscious as he was that Marie de Nicolai was the object of his admiration.

Who and what was he? Of course the question soon became of interest; and Marie Cappelle, who was of a romantic turn, was not long in finding out all there was to know.

His name was Felix Clavé; he belonged to the citizen class, and was engaged in literature. He had published a volume of poems; and he wrote articles for the *Revue des deux Mondes*, which, however, were never inserted! On the whole he seems to have been a vain and silly young fellow, with no great harm in him.

One day the girls were talking and laughing over their conquest, when Marie Cappelle proposed, for a joke, to write a letter to M. Felix Clavé. She accordingly wrote, without signature:

"For health, a walk in the Champs-Élysées; for salvation, a station at Saint-Philippe-du-Roule at the hour of service."

Presently afterwards she told her friend that she had posted the letter.

Mademoiselle de Nicolai replied:

"You are mad!"—and seemed annoyed and ashamed at such a piece of folly. With an idea of repairing the mischief, they indited between them a second letter, Marie Cappelle still being the scribe,

in which they begged M. Clavé to forgive the ill-advised pleasantry, and not to seek to discover the authors.

To this Marie de Nicolai received an anonymous answer, enigmatical to those who were not in the secret, but of which she could not mistake the meaning. Another letter followed, where the writer, having grown bolder, signed himself F. C. Frightened at the dilemma she was in, she flew to Marie Cappellet for advice.

Marie Cappellet was not in the least frightened. On the contrary, the little intrigue was quite to her taste; besides, she had an unlucky talent for letter-writing. A complicated correspondence was now started. Marie Cappellet wrote to Felix Clavé, and Felix Clavé wrote to Marie Cappellet, and Marie Cappellet wrote to Marie de Nicolai, and Marie de Nicolai wrote back to Marie Cappellet.

The subject of all these letters was the passion of M. Clavé for Mademoiselle de Nicolai; and this unique system of love-making was carried on till midsummer. No evidence exists that the two young people ever spoke to each other except on one occasion. Upon the 12th of May, Marie de Nicolai accompanied her mother and Marie Cappellet to a ball at Tivoli. Clavé was present. He was her partner for one dance, and about thirty words passed between them.

After this meeting he complained that he was more unhappy than before. "Then I had a hope which consoled me: I hoped to see her, to speak to her; now all is at an end." He poured out his poetic soul with increased fervour to Marie Cappellet. He begged her to read his poems: "They are flowers strewn upon a remembrance, upon a tomb, but perhaps you will both know me better after you have read them." He also requested that Mademoiselle de Nicolai might be informed that if she had enemies he would kill them, if she had friends he would die for them. Then, coming down from the realms of genius, he entreated Mademoiselle Cappellet to say all she might judge proper to "reanimate a dying flame, which perhaps has never burnt very strongly."

In that he spoke like a man of sense. At all events Marie de Nicolai seemed to feel as the summer advanced, that this folly had been carried far enough. Having made up her mind to that effect, she took her governess, Mademoiselle Delvaux, into her confidence. That lady, who certainly appeared to have been rather remiss in watching over her pupil's conduct, was very much upset. Under the excitement of the moment, she stigmatised Marie Cappellet as a "dangerous serpent." What was more to the point, she called immediately upon that young person and insisted upon the return of all Mademoiselle de Nicolai's letters.

Marie Cappellet was then living with her aunt, the wife of M. Garat of the Bank of France.

She excused herself to Mademoiselle Delvaux by saying that the letters were in a cupboard of which Madame Garat had the key, but

promised to have them ready by the next day. The next day Mademoiselle Delvaux called again, and learned, with surprise, that Mademoiselle Cappellet was out of town, having started that morning at six o'clock.

Eventually, however, the greater number of the letters were returned. But Mademoiselle de Nicolai was uneasy that any should be missing. "Tell me," she wrote, "if you do not recollect having burnt one of which I am sure: perhaps even two or three."

Marie Cappellet had not burnt these letters; she had kept them for reasons of her own. Whatever the motive might have been, it was a simple matter to invent some plausible explanation. Mademoiselle de Nicolai was satisfied. This affair which seemed likely to break up the friendship, caused no breach.

Two months from this time, Felix Clavé quitted France for Africa, in his own words to be "scorched up by a foreign sun, painful, pitiless."

He departed upon the 10th of October, 1836. In February 1838, Mademoiselle de Nicolai was married to the Vicomte de Léautaud.

In June 1839, she and her husband were staying with other company at Busagny, M. de Nicolai's country-seat near Pontoise: Marie Cappellet being one of the guests.

During this visit, a very remarkable circumstance occurred. One Sunday Madame de Léautaud brought down into the drawing-room her set of diamonds, a wedding-gift, to show to some of the ladies present. The value of the jewels was from two to three hundred pounds. They were taken back and deposited in the drawer of a table in her bed-chamber. The next day, Monday, they were again seen safe in the jewel-case. On the following Sunday, it was found that they had disappeared.

Consternation filled the house. At first a vague hope was felt that M. or Madame de Nicolai had purposely abstracted the property to teach their daughter a lesson of caution, her conduct being rather lax with respect to locks and keys. But this surmise proved fallacious.

The same evening M. de Nicolai announced to the servants that a theft had been committed, and that they would be interrogated and their boxes examined.

In this anxious time, Mademoiselle Cappellet was the only person who preserved her cheerfulness. She said jokingly to her maid: "It is I who stole the diamonds. I have swallowed them."

Gendarmes were sent for from Pontoise. A strict search was made. But not a trace of the lost jewels was to be detected; nothing to raise the least suspicion. Yet all the details pointed to the fact of the theft having been committed by someone in the house.

M. Allard, the police official who had charge of the case, was non-plussed. His investigations led nowhere. When giving evidence at the trial, he stated:

"From time to time M. de Léautaud came to me. 'Has anything

been discovered?' he inquired. 'Nothing,' I replied. At the fifth or sixth interview, he said to me: 'It is astonishing, it is incredible, that you can discover nothing. Yet at Busagny there were only the servants and one or two strangers.' 'But,' said I to him, 'amongst the persons admitted into intimacy, there are often thieves. We have frequent examples of it at Paris.' 'It is a very delicate matter,' said M. de Léautaud; 'nevertheless, there was at Busagny a young person about whom singular things have been said; but I dare not suspect her too much.'

"He presently mentioned that this young person's name was Marie Cappelle, 'and the further we go,' said he, 'the more suspicions strengthen. Mademoiselle Cappelle is going to be married. This marriage is so precipitate that I cannot account for it. I much fear that she has got up this occasion in order to make use of the diamonds which have disappeared. Cannot you make inquiries; keep watch?'

"M. Allard replied that he had no power of surveillance except in the interior of Paris. 'But this is in Paris, it is in Paris that she lives.' 'Where?' 'At the bank of France, with Madame Garat, her aunt.'

Then M. Allard bethought himself, how, about two years before, he had paid a professional visit to the Bank of France. Whilst in the house he had noticed a young lady with black hair, and a pale face singularly expressive of sweetness and melancholy. But he did not know whether Mademoiselle Cappelle was then staying with her aunt. His business at that time had been with Madame Garat, senior, who also resided at the Bank. That lady had been robbed of a bank-note for five hundred francs which had been abstracted from an *escritoire* in her bed-room. Like the robbery at Busagny, there was no sign whatever of the premises having been broken into.

M. de Léautaud could say nothing to this story but what he had said before. "It is a very delicate matter;" adding, "by random suspicions we may compromise this person."

For all that, the random suspicions kept aiming at the same mark. Madame de Montbreton, Madame de Léautaud's elder sister, was Marie Cappelle's first and best friend in the family. One day, the day after Christmas, 1839, she said to her mother, "Mamma, I have a frightful thought; but, indeed, I dare not tell it you; this frightful thought pursues me everywhere."

"Ah! Dare you not tell me," replied Madame de Nicolai. "Well, I will tell you your frightful thought. We all suspect that it was Marie Cappelle who stole the diamonds."

By mutual consent, however, Madame de Léautaud and her relatives continued to keep the affair quiet.

Meanwhile Marie Cappelle had astonished society by a sudden marriage. She describes the circumstances in her own lively style. "Wednesday, I saw a gentleman at Musard. I pleased him, and he did not much please me. Thursday, he called on my aunt; he

showed himself so attentive, so good, that I found him better. Friday, he made his formal suit. Saturday, I did not say yes, but I did not say no; and Sunday, to-day, the banns are published."

The letter containing this announcement was written at the end of July 1839. The wedding took place on the 12th of August. Bride and bridegroom started from Paris the following night for Limosin.

Marie Cappelle was gone. She had left her old life a hundred and thirty leagues behind. No more might ever have been heard of the diamond robbery except for another event. That event introduced her under a new name, which has become eminent amongst criminals.

Five months after the marriage, on the 14th of January, 1840, her husband, Charles Lafarge, a young man of twenty-eight, died, as was alleged, by arsenic poisoning. A few days later she was in custody on the charge of murder.

As soon as this news reached Paris, M. de Léautaud sought out M. Allard. "Ah, well," said he, "my suspicions are justified. Madame Lafarge is arrested on the accusation of having poisoned her husband. From her singular and romantic character, I have the conviction that the diamonds are still in her possession, and that if a search is made at her house, they will be recovered. Cannot you take this proceeding?"

A legal order was obtained, and at the house at Glaudier, certain jewels were found which had been removed from their settings, probably with a penknife or a pair of scissors.

These stones were identified by M. Lecointe, a jeweller of the Rue Castiglioni, Paris, as having formed part of a set made up by him for Madame de Léautaud at the time of her marriage. All the diamonds were there, but seven or eight, perhaps nine pearls were missing.

Antoine Nicolas Fauveau, shopman to M. Fossin, jeweller, of the Rue Richelieu, deposed that on the 5th of August, 1839, Mademoiselle Cappelle had brought some pearls to their shop, which had been mounted into two pins and a ring under her direction. The pins were sent home to her at the Bank of France, and she represented to her aunt that they were the gift of her godfather.

Of the diamonds she gave two contradictory accounts. Finally when hard pushed, she admitted that the jewels were the property of her friend.

M. Theodore Bac, one of Madame Lafarge's counsel, then came to Paris, and called upon Madame de Léautaud. In the course of her evidence, she described what took place.

"He began by saying, 'The diamonds seized at Glaudier are, indeed, yours; but they have not been stolen.' Then he stopped short. My husband pressed him to continue; he would not; the question being, said he, delicate; it was a subject difficult to

approach. 'The diamonds,' added he, 'have been taken for a purpose that I cannot mention.' My husband invited M. Bac to go on, and, as the latter still held back, said to him smiling, 'Come, sir, tell the whole. The question is of a lover, is it not?' He replied, 'I have not come to you without a letter from Madame Lafarge. This letter you can read,' and he drew it from his pocket. 'I am going to read it at once,' said I, and I read it aloud."

This letter was, in fact, a very artfully-conceived defence, shifting the guilt of the supposed theft upon Madame de Léautaud's own shoulders.

Felix Clavé was the point upon which the plea rested. That intrigue was expanded into proportions which filled Madame de Léautaud with indignation. She was accused of having encouraged the "handsome Spaniard," and then heartlessly thrown him over as soon as she discovered that he had neither fortune nor family. He is represented to have been so bitterly aggrieved at her treatment, to have so thirsted for vengeance, that the "position became intolerable; it was necessary to send him away; for that it was necessary to have money."

Subsequently, on her trial, Madame Lafarge worked up the picture which was here only sketched. She declared that in the month of December 1838 she went to see Madame de Léautaud, "who told me that she was desperate, and that money was absolutely indispensable to buy the silence of M. Clavé, as she could no longer live in this state of fear and uncertainty." A few months later, Madame de Léautaud was made to insist again upon the need of obtaining money, and to complain of the continual torments she endured from dread of the indiscretion of M. Clavé. "She added that she knew a means, that she had diamonds, and that she had a mind to steal them herself and sell them."

According to Madame Lafarge's account, this act of self-spoliation was actually committed. Then she and Madame de Léautaud between them detached the jewels from their settings and sewed them up in a wadded sachet of cherry-coloured satin. "It was agreed," so the letter continued, "that you should confide your diamonds to me, in order that I should lend on them or try to sell them to meet the terms of the stipulated payment."

Next follow threats of exposure: "I am obliged to confide what I say to you to my counsel. All these facts will be known. You know that I have the proofs in my hands. These are the proofs: the letters written by you and by him. Your letters to me."

Having thus prepared the way, the writer at length was explicit as to what she wanted: "There is now only one thing to do: you must by a note signed by your hand, dated in the month of June, declare that you confided your diamonds to me in deposit, with authority to sell them if I judged fit. This will stop the affair. You will explain your conduct to your husband as you may think proper; all your

letters will be sent back to you, and the most profound secrecy will preserve your honour and your repose."

Madame de Léautaud was not probably a very clever woman, and appears to have been rather timid in character. No one knew that better than Marie Cappelle. But Marie Cappelle's day was over. The time was gone by when she was a leading star to this girl. Her sharp wits now only blunted their point against the duller mind. This long communication of hers was so much waste paper. Upon the 5th of April, her counsel, M. Bac, returned to Brives, having completely failed in procuring the declaration.

Ten days after his departure, M. Lachaud, the other counsel for the defence, arrived in Paris. He saw Madame de Nicolai and her daughter several times. "Some days after his first visit," said Madame de Léautaud, "he told us that he had received a fresh letter from Madame Lafarge, entreating him to see me again and ask me to sign a note, a kind of recognition, dated in the month of June of the preceding year, in which I should declare that I had confided my diamonds to her. I replied: 'But what you propose is a falsehood . . . and I refuse.' He then said that he expected this reply; that he owed to Madame Lafarge his services, but that he did not owe her his conscience."

In July 1840, after a trial lasting seven days, Madame Lafarge was convicted of the theft of the diamonds. One of the circumstances which told strongly against her case was the very line of defence she had adopted. Her imputations against Felix Clavé entirely fell to the ground. The testimony of reliable witnesses proved him to have been an honourable man. His letters assuredly had nothing mean or vicious in them. There was not a grain of evidence that he ever set foot in Paris between the years 1836 and 1839. On the contrary there was good reason to know that he was in Africa during the whole of that interval. When he did return to France, it was after the theft of the diamonds, and he soon again departed to take up a very desirable position in Mexico. Throughout this time his means were considerable, and he could have had no temptation to descend to such shameful conduct as that laid to his charge. Besides, it did not appear that his early passion had left any very damaging effect upon his heart. When informed of the marriage of Mademoiselle de Nicolai, he merely remarked: "So *she* is married; you ought to tell me the name of her husband."

The tissue of falsehood which Marie Cappelle's lively brain had fabricated was ruthlessly rent to pieces by the summing-up. On the 15th of July judgment was pronounced. Immense crowds lined the avenues to the court. Inside, every available seat was occupied, and elegantly-dressed women were ranged three deep round the estrade. In the midst of the eager assembly sat the motionless figure with which the spectators had been familiar from day to day. With her eyes cast down and covered by their long lashes, so she had sat from

the beginning, in her widow's dress, with her jet black hair, her white face seemed to be set in a "dark aureole of mourning."

Less than two months later, the same figure sat before the Court of Assizes at Tulle, where Marie Cappellet was brought up for trial on the accusation of having poisoned her husband, Charles Lafarge.

For having "fraudulently appropriated a set of diamonds belonging to Madame Léautaud," Marie Cappellet, the widow of Lafarge, received sentence of two years imprisonment. On the charge of poisoning her husband, she was likewise found guilty, extenuating circumstances being admitted. The sentence was penal servitude for life.

S. J. JAMES.

THE SEASON'S PAGEANT.

REJOICE! rejoice!

The song of birds have burst upon the air,
The joyous lark and lilted thrush
Proclaim that Spring is there.

Look up! look up!

The sun hath donned his crown of reddest gold,
And in the meadow, field and hedge
Ten thousand flowers unfold.

Pass on! pass on!

The tender leaf hath turned a deeper green,
And glorious Summer standeth now
Where erstwhile Spring was seen;
Nor shall her reign endure for long
Her roses soon are o'er,
For Autumn cometh on apace
Bringing abundant store.
And vintners bear the purple grape
And harvestmen the corn,
And loudly rings o'er hill and fen
The huntsman's cheery horn.

Away! away!

Time tarries not, each hath his little hour,
And hushed is now the song of birds
And faded every flower;
For Winter with his icy touch
Doth chill the hearts of all,
And silent, softly, falling snow
Is weaving Nature's pall.

JOYCE GARRAWAY.

DORA'S DISENCHANTMENT.

BY INA GARVEY.

TO begin with, I must tell you that Philip's cousin, Dora, is quite the prettiest girl I have ever seen ; and how Phil could look at *me* with such a specimen of feminine perfection before his eyes, is beyond my comprehension.

Dora was spending the whole of that summer with us at our little rustic home, three miles from Pettytown, where Phil is partner in a flourishing firm of lawyers, and I was beginning to be afraid the dear girl—for she is a very dear girl, and if a little too romantic and unpractical, these are faults the world will only too soon cure her of—would tire of the country, the whole country, and nothing but the country. For we are intensely rustic at Sleepidell, very far from the world of traffic, shop-windows, theatres, and evening-papers. Why, the chief local sensation of the early summer was when the new curate took to wearing a sailor-hat, and a strange face in our little ancient church on a Sunday morning sends us all home to our early dinners quite excited.

Our house is a composite sort of affair, part villa, part cottage, part farm, and all the rest roses and honeysuckle. We have a cow, two pigs, some poultry, ducks, and geese, in fact, as Phil says, there's not too much farm, but just farm enough.

I was dreadfully afraid that, spending the summer with us, Dora might get bored, and feel the want of more society and excitement. Therefore I was not at all sorry when, in the middle of July, I received a letter from my cousin, Langford Soames, saying in his unique way that, "The clash of intellects in London had well-nigh deafened him : the glare of the pavements had well-nigh blinded him : the New Woman, in novels and newspapers, on platforms and on bicycles, had well-nigh maddened him, and might he come to Sleepidell for a month, to breathe the scent of the hay, and try to forget that there was such a thing as latter-day civilisation?"

Of course you know the name of Langford Soames? It is quite unnecessary to tell you that he is one of the best known of those poets whom certain critics cruelly dub "minor." His last volume of verses—between you and me, the majority of them were dreadfully lugubrious and pessimist in tone—had a good deal of success, and enjoyed the distinction of being pronounced by the "Infallible Review," "A green oasis in the desert of jejune contemporary verse, and a distinct and notable advance on the author's previous inchoate efforts."

Dear, dear, what words these critics use. I wonder if they invent any of them?

In addition to his labours on Parnassus, my cousin Langford is on the staff of one or two weekly reviews, for which he writes articles and notes on *The State of Human Society*—What the World is coming to—*Signs of the Times*—*The Decay of Everything*—and large subjects of that kind. In short, he is a very clever fellow, and a good-looking fellow, and would be an altogether pleasant fellow, if he were a little more manly and a little less affected.

As I said just now, I was pleased for Dora's sake, on receiving Langford's letter, that we should have some society to cheer our rustic monotony. On second thoughts, however, my pleasure became a little tinged with anxiety. Dora was lovely, still in her teens, romantic, a hero-worshipper: Langford, young, good-looking, and a poet. Would it be advisable to throw them together in the picturesque solitudes of *Sleepidell-cum-Snoreboro'*? Langford was as much given to making love as to making poetry, and was a professed beauty-worshipper. Dora was impressionable, unworldly, and quite ready to fall in love with my interesting poet-cousin, whenever she should meet him.

Would Langford win her heart merely for sport? Or even putting the less deplorable case that they fell in love mutually and entirely, and an engagement came of it, should I feel that I had helped to bring about a marriage likely to result in happiness?

"Oh, hang it, there you go, Mary," cried Phil, when I told him my doubts. Like the rest of your sex, you can't see a young man and woman exchange half-a-dozen words or walk half-a-dozen steps together, but you jump at once to white satin and orange-blossom, or else a broken heart for one of 'em. Ten to one Dora won't be much impressed with the poet when she does see him; and as for Langford, he's a vast deal too much in love with himself to fall in love with anyone else. But if you are afraid of throwing them so much together, why not ask Will too? There's safety in numbers; he'd come between them and act as what politicians call a 'buffer-state.' Besides, he's a real good fellow, and worth twenty of his poetic brother, to *my* thinking.

So I invited them both for a month, and they accepted. When Dora heard that a "real live poet," warranted to eat and drink like ordinary mortals, and to behave prettily when not stroked the wrong way, a poet whose verse she was already greatly smitten with, was going to be her fellow-guest at *Sleepidell* cottage, her excitement was quite absurd.

On a blazing July afternoon, Dora and I took the sociable and our dear old mare, Peggy, and drove to the railway-station to meet the 4.30 down train. It duly disgorged my two cousins, Will, the elder by two years, as cordial and pleasant as ever; Langford, evidently fatigued by the hot journey, and a little the worse for wear as to

temper. I brought them out to where Dora, rather fluttered, was seated in the sociable, and, having made the necessary introductions, I took the reins and drove Peggy home. Langford, seeming to forget all his fatigue and boredom, talked to Dora the whole way, and I could perceive hardly allowed his brother to get in a word.

We all went for a stroll in the lanes and fields that evening, Phil and I, Dora, Langford, and Will. We started en masse, but did not long remain so. Langford, in spite of his fatigue, walked on with Dora, deep in the discussion of a poem of his which had appeared in that month's *Superlative Magazine*.

"Well, cousin Will," said I, taking his arm—a comfortable sturdy arm it was—"and how does architecture get on? Are you on the way to becoming a second Wren yet?"

"Great parts require great opportunities," struck in Phil. "Give Will the opportunity Wren had—let London be burnt down again—and I've no doubt he'd build something that would surprise us all."

"Yes, I think I could promise you *that*," said Will laughing heartily.

My eyes wandered to the couple in front; "Dora and Langford seem to have a great deal to say to each other," I remarked.

Will assented, adding, "She is very beautiful."

"My wife has been fretting," said Phil, "about putting such dangerous material as my pretty cousin and your poetic brother into what Arthur Clough calls 'juxtaposition.'"

Will smiled, and then said rather wistfully: "Sometimes I wish the dear old fellow could get married. He's a bit difficult to share diggings with. Only a woman, I think, can thoroughly understand and manage a poet when he's not in print."

"Ah," said I sympathetically, "I know, Will. I've always had a suspicion that Langford, like his favourite Carlyle, is 'gey ill to live wi'. Well, I suppose a poet is bound to be discontented and fretful; it's part of his stock-in-trade. And he is only carrying out the promise of his childhood. I remember hearing poor aunt Soames say once, recalling Langford's babyhood, that all the nourishment he took turned to screams. And he screams still—in volumes of clever, pessimist verse, bound in art colours."

Phil had lingered behind to light his pipe, and Will became more confidential about his brother. "I don't want to judge him or blame him," he said; "the spoiling at home years ago is answerable for much. You remember, Mary, how he used to be called the genius, and how the rest of us had to give way to him. The old fellow is rather aggravating at times, I can't help confessing. He's so full of philosophy over other people's misfortunes, and so impatient if they don't bear them like Spartans, or Stoics, or whoever those chaps were that didn't mind anything. I had rather a facer some months ago, a business disappointment, and Langford was down on me like a hundred of bricks for being a little bothered about it; told me that

to *him* such things were mere trifles, with no power to vex or hurt him, because he 'heard the roll of the ages.' But the 'roll of the ages' didn't seem able to do much for him when his publisher sent him a disappointing account of the sale of one of his works: he hardly spoke for two days. Another thing too, when all's well with him, but not with me, he's fond of coming it over me with the Indian legend that our life is nothing more than a dream of Buddha's. When I came in one night, fagged and hungry, and Mrs. Tebbitts sent up my chop burnt almost black, Langford said with a superior smile (he had dined well himself, and was comfortably smoking in an arm-chair), 'how can you let such a trifle ruffle you? Nothing is worth being angry about. Remember, it is all a dream, a dream of Buddha's.' 'All right,' said I; 'I've no objection, but I'll just thank Buddha to dream me a landlady that's not a fool, and a chop that's not a cinder.' Next morning at breakfast, when he had a stale egg, he used much more unparliamentary language than I had used over the chop, and didn't seem to care twopence whether Buddha was asleep or awake."

Philip had rejoined us during the latter part of Will's speech, and laughed heartily at it.

Presently we came up with Langford and Dora. The former was leaning on a stile gazing at the sunset. "See," he was saying to his companion: "see that group of tall, solemn trees; there is not enough wind to stir their branches, but every leaf is alive, fluttering, quivering, against that background of fire. Another day gone. Nature has lowered her gorgeous act-drop." Dora looked a good deal impressed.

"Is that your own?" asked Phil, as we joined them.

"My own?"

"Yes; is that original, to call the sunset Nature's act-drop?"

"Oh, yes," with a smile and a shrug.

"I thought perhaps you were quoting from a brother poet," said Phil.

"No, not then," answered Langford, still leaning on the stile and gazing pensively at the prospect, "though, I own, I often quote from my brother poets; and I must go to one of them in order to describe the feelings produced in me by such a scene as this; for it is, strangely enough, when we look upon earth at her fairest that we feel most strongly the divine discontent of earth."

I glanced rather uneasily at Dora. She seemed to drink in every word my poetic cousin uttered. I was already beginning to repent having brought them together. Langford was a young man of many moods, but, whether he chose to be serious, pessimistic, philosophic or quaintly and humorously frivolous, girls seem to find him equally fascinating. He was in the latter mood when he came down to breakfast the following morning.

"Well, Soames," said Phil, "does our rusticity continue to please you? Have you begun a poem *à la* Wordsworth, to be entitled

'Sleepidell Visited?' It *was* Wordsworth, wasn't it, who wrote 'Yarrow Visited,' 'Yarrow Unvisited' and all that stuff?"

Langford deigned no answer to this latter query. "I haven't been doing any work this morning," he said, "though I was unwillingly dragged from my dreams at dawn."

"By what?" I asked.

"By your ducks, cousin Mary; but don't apologise. Though they 'robbed me of that which not enriched them, and left me poor indeed,' they helped me to a discovery that shatters a long-established delusion. Ducks do *not* say quack. I have not yet satisfactorily arranged the sequence of vowels and consonants which expresses what they *do* say; but it is *not* quack, and never again shall quack figure in my writings as good duckese."

"What delicious fresh eggs you have here, Mary!" cried Will, who had been out walking and was eating with a great appetite. "We don't get eggs like these in the Little Village, eh Lang?"

"The London eggs are often bad, I suppose?" said I.

"Oh, we'll not say *bad*, Phil," replied Langford quietly. "*Bad* is a word we are using more and more charily in London, where the problem-play and the problem-novel have educated our tongues; let us say, rather, that the London egg is often an egg with a past."

He used to make us laugh a good deal with his speeches when he was in that sort of mood. And day after day I could see that, grave or gay, he won more of Dora's little impressive hero-worshipping heart. Twice a week he shut himself up in his room for several hours, to write articles and correct proofs. On these occasions I fancied that I saw Dora's spirits flag, in spite of all Will's efforts to entertain her. Poor Will! with no hope of succeeding in any love-affair where the good-looking young poet, his brother, was also competing, he was yet desperately smitten with Dora's loveliness and sweetness.

The days passed quickly enough, and as the month which my cousins were to spend at Sleepidell was slipping away, it became more and more evident to my woman's eye, that, whether Langford were in earnest or not, Dora was falling in love with him, more especially after I had found and surreptitiously read this effusion signed L. S. in the child's album:

"Before thy throne, young Queen of Grace,
Thy humblest vassal bows his face,
And seeks a boon of thee,—
One smile, one glance so soft and shy,
Heart's Idol, from that lip and eye,
He begs on bended knee."

After reading this, I say, and noting Dora's manner day by day, I took Will's opinion privately as to his brother's "intentions." Will was straightforward, but not reassuring. Seen even through *his*

rose-coloured spectacles, Langford was a professed flirt, who, much as he *wrote* about hearts, had small scruple in breaking, or perhaps it would be best to say, *chipping* them. I was too fond of my pretty, loving Dora to be able to bear with equanimity the thought of her heart being even *chipped*; and as the close of Langford and Will's stay approached, my anxiety on her account became almost painful. If Langford had meant nothing by his attentions, then I was afraid Dora would have to go through a time of great unhappiness. And even if he were serious, I was very far from thinking him the man to make an affectionate, earnest-natured girl happy. I told Philip of my disquietude. "Well," he said cruelly, "you shouldn't have asked them together. When a beauty and a poet are guests in the same house, there are pretty sure to be ructions." Phil does use such strange words sometimes.

It was two days before the time when Langford and Will were to leave us, that, one afternoon, we went for a long ramble, taking with us the necessaries for an *al fresco* tea. We rambled on till we were hot, tired, and thirsty, and then set to work to find a pleasant, shady spot, to boil our kettle and spread our tea. Looking over a rather high and formidable stile set in the tall, stiff hedge that bordered the green lane where we found ourselves at four o'clock, we saw a wide, undulating meadow. About thirty yards from the stile was a noble chestnut tree, inviting us to come and have our tea in the cool, green gloom which its ample, leafy branches made on the hot, sunny sward. The other side of the meadow was bounded by a high fence, in which was a gate standing partly open.

We waited to sign to the two laggards, Langford and Dora, and then climbed the stile, and, in another minute, Philip and Will had set down their baskets, for on these two worthy men had fallen the whole burden of our picnic-tea, and thrown themselves down in the shade.

The two stragglers joined us directly, and very soon the white cloth was spread in the shade of the chestnut tree, the kettle was boiling with the help of—alas, for our up-to-date rusticity!—a little spirit-lamp, and bread-and-butter, jam, cakes, toast, and veal-and-ham patties (made by somebody who shall be nameless) were set forth temptingly.

"Hallo, Langford," said Phil, when tea was about half over, "What ails you, old chap? 'Divine discontent of earth' or 'the roll of the ages' or indigestion, or Buddha's dream growing a bit wearisome, or what?"

Langford, who was half reclining on the grass, leaning on one elbow, and holding a half-consumed veal-and-ham patty in one hand and his cup of tea in the other, smiled in his quiet, superior fashion.

"Nothing ails me, Horton. If I fell silent, it was only because I was thinking."

"Give us the benefit of your thoughts, Langford!" said I;

"They're generally worth listening to." And Dora more than endorsed my words with her eyes.

Langford shrugged his shoulders and sipped his tea. "I was only thinking how impossible it is for any one to assert positively that anything outside himself has any existence at all. Fair scenes,"—he looked at the prospect around us—"beautiful faces"—I felt that he glanced at Dora, and that Dora blushed—"the sound of dear voices, the touch of warm hands, how do I know that anything *real* is attached to these? How am I to prove to myself that I do not stand alone, alone, the only living, sentient, self-conscious being in a world of visions, ghosts, sensations, simulacra?"

"I know jolly well that this veal-and-ham patty is real!" said Will. "And what's more, real good, thanks to our right trusty and right entirely beloved cousin, Mary, whose health I have much pleasure in eating. Why, Lang, you're getting as bad as Berkeley; wasn't that the old joker that scared commonsensical folk by telling them there was nothing solid or tangible anywhere?"

"How the good bishop has been misunderstood by what Carlyle calls the 'common, dim population!'" exclaimed Langford, rather rudely, I thought. "And even by Byron, when the poet wanted to commit some verses on the subject, and say something smart. Berkeley's view was precisely the view of the vulgar herd that start affrighted from his doctrines. When Berkeley said there was no matter or substance, he meant matter and substance in the *philosopher's* sense. A certain school of thinkers hold that, under all that our senses perceive, which they call phenomena and pronounce ephemeral, lies a something unalterable, which they style the noumenon, and of which the senses have no cognisance. It was this noumenon—or matter—or substance—whichever you may choose to call it, that Berkeley ignored, and so proved himself the intellectual ally of every commonplace toiler in the cities or the fields."

"Well, well," said I; "these are mysteries that we may run our heads against till they ache, so long as we can only see 'through a glass darkly,' but, please God, by-and-by, we shall be permitted to know, and all mysteries will be cleared up."

"'Death is the veil which those who live call life, they sleep, and it is lifted,'" quoted Langford, gaily dreamily at the summer sky. "How *can* people dread death, when it is the only way of solving the problems that so torture us during our little span of life."

Dora shuddered a little. "I can't help dreading death. Do you really not fear it at all, Mr. Soames?"

Langford made as if he threw something light from his hand. "So much for it! To the truly philosophic mind, Miss Dora, death is nothing. The Stoic of old said death and life were the same; and, being mockingly asked: 'Why don't you kill yourself, then?' answered, 'Because it is just the same.' That is pretty much my own state of mind with regard to the King of Terrors."

Dora looked much impressed, and we were all silent for a few moments. The silence was broken by Phil's shouting, as he sprang up: "Hallo! Look out!" in a tone of voice that brought us all to our feet in a twinkling.

Gracious Heavens. What a sight met our eyes! Scarcely twenty yards from us was a savage-looking bull, which had evidently come through the open gate at the other side of the field, and, so long as we were sitting still, had advanced silently towards us. But the movement among us as we all sprang to our feet and looked at him, made him begin to paw the ground fiercely, and utter short roars, dread heralds of a rush.

"Steady!" shouted Will. "Keep your heads. Horton and Lang, get the girls to the stile as quickly as you can. The brute'll be on us in two-two's, leave me to deal with him," and Will caught up the table-cloth from the grass, emptying off our poor picnic-tea.

The horror of those moments that followed often comes back to me in dreams; the being dragged, panting, across the sward to the stile; the being unceremoniously bundled over into the lane, but not before I had glanced back in dread, had seen Will with the table-cloth in his hands, and the bull rushing at him, head down, had seen him spring aside, had seen the infuriated creature, its head enveloped in the cloth, plunging madly, blindly, this way and that, and Will running for his life towards us.

"Where's Langford?" I gasped in fresh horror, when Will and the rest of us were safe out of sight behind the high hedge in the lane. "Where's Langford?"

"Don't be uneasy," answered Phil, drily; "in spite of his wish to 'solve the great mystery,' in spite of his contempt for the King of Terrors, our poet-philosopher climbed up the chestnut tree for all he was worth, and left Will to act the hero. He'll lie perdu among the branches until that rather unpleasant part of Buddha's dream, the bull, gives him an opportunity of coming down."

Whether he had really meant nothing with regard to Dora, or whether shame at the part he had played in our peril drove all thoughts of love away, I am unable to say. But Langford went back to town two days later without making Dora an offer, and Dora, quite disenchanted with her sometime hero, did not wear even the *least* little bit of the willow for him.

"But, mind you," said Phil to me privately; "I don't know that we ought all to have condemned cousin Langford's conduct so utterly. After all, it wasn't altogether inconsistent. When he went aloft, and left us all in the lurch on terra firma, he was only once more giving proof of that 'divine discontent of earth,' that he suffers from." He paused, and then added: "And so you see, Mary, Sleepidell was *not* destined to be the theatre of a love-match between your cousin and mine."

"I'm not so sure about that, my dear Philip," I retorted; "Langford is not my only cousin."

A YARN.

MID-WINTER 'twas in Australian seas,
 But Victoria, fair and gay,
 Looked down on the cutters that rode at ease
 'Twixt the low sandy heads of the bay.
 Riding at ease till the signal gun
 Boomed from the harbour bar
 For a pilot craft; and on board of one
 Was a man they called Jem Mar.

Beyond the heads raged a furious gale,
 Waves massed in a leaden form,
 The word went forward to back foresail
 And make all taut for the storm.
 But something jammed in the sharp down haul,
 They hardly knew how to steer;
 The halyards somehow had gotten foul,
 And Jem went aloft to clear.

But a huge green sea o'er the bulwarks rose,
 The mainmast totter'd and broke:
 A reel—a shiver—and over she goes,
 Turned right on her side by the stroke.
 Three men were carried clear off the craft
 With a cry of anguish—their last!
 But Jem sat steady astride the gaff,
 Just clear of the shattered mast.

They cut away boldly with axe and knife
 The tangled masses of gear,
 But they knew right well what to them was life
 Must be certain death to Mar.
 He saw it—and spite of the blinding drift
 And the furious roar of the sea,
 They heard his strong brave voice uplift
 As he sang out lustily—

“Chop away, mates!” But a stroke or two,
 And the cutter came up like a bird.
 For they did it as they were bound to do,
 As soon as he gave the word.
 And slowly away drove the broken spar
 With the man who would never touch land;
 And the last of Jem that his messmates saw,
 He was cheerily waving his hand!

C. E. MEETKERKE.

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